The Disabled Tyrant's Beloved Pet Fish
Canji Baojun De Zhangxin Yu Chong
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XUE SHAN FEI HU

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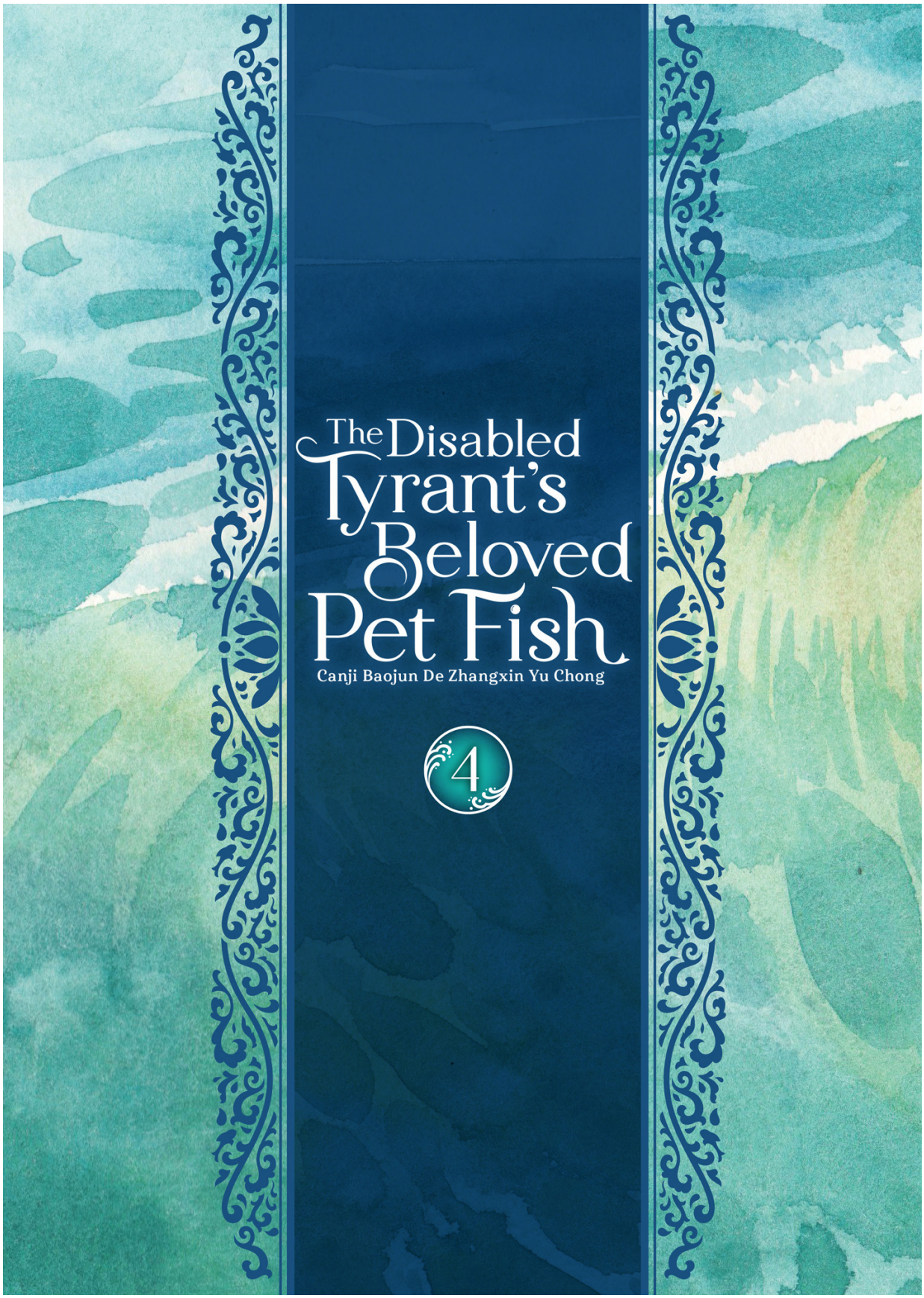
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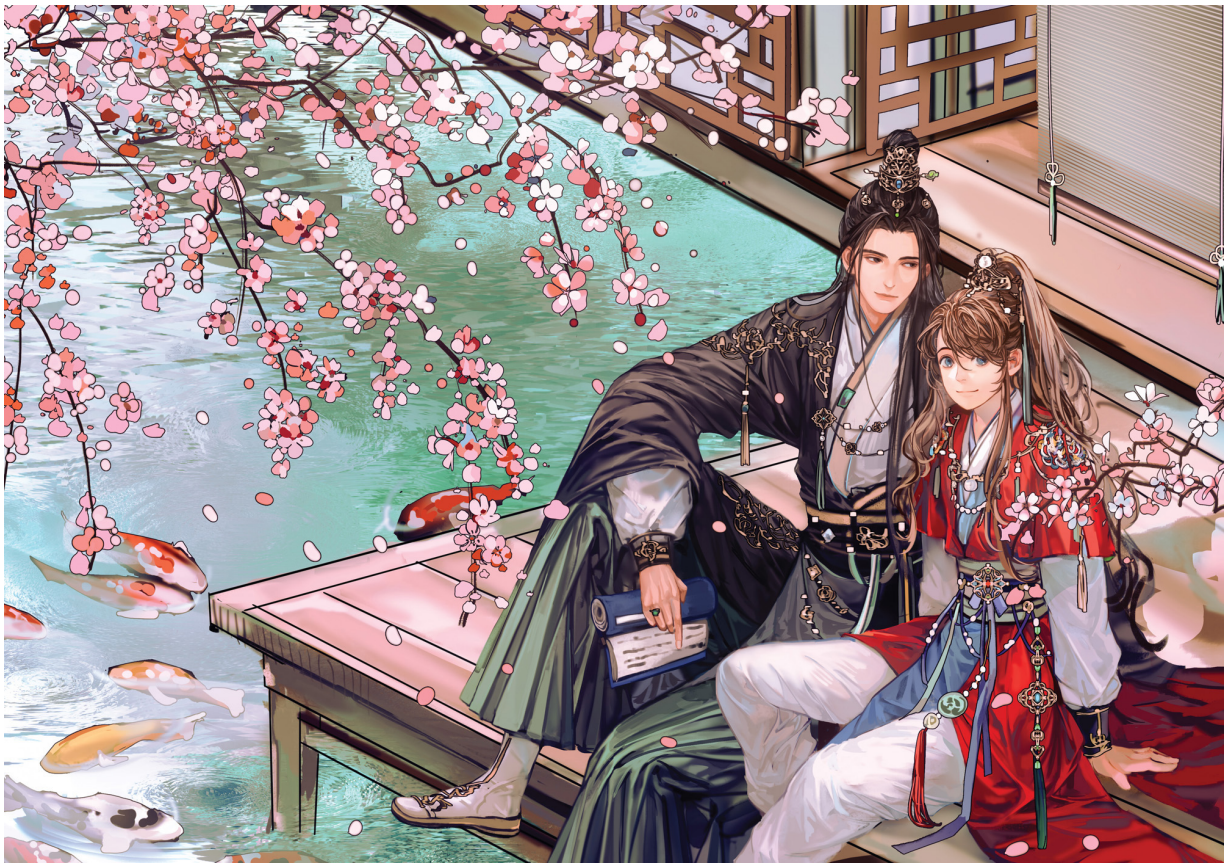

The Disabled Tyrant's Beloved Pet Fish

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Chapter 115:
Fish Baby Therapy

PRINCE JING PULLED open the curtain inside the tent. Wang Xi was standing guard outside for the night and hadn't gone to bed yet. "Your Highness, don't worry," he said hurriedly when he saw Prince Jing. "I'll go take a look…"

Prince Jing nodded and gestured for Wang Xi to be careful, and Wang Xi ducked out of the tent. Prince Jing looked down at the children. They didn't seem affected by being forced to sleep somewhere different from their usual; they were so fast asleep that their cheeks were rosy.

Prince Jing carried the children over to Li Yu and wrapped all the fish up together in a brocade quilt. Then, he unsheathed his sword and stood next to the bed, silent.

Li Yu was a little nervous and kept trying to comfort himself. Even though he wasn't sure what the sixth prince was going to do, he didn't think he'd be able to manage anything too drastic.

Together, he and Prince Jing waited for Wang Xi's news.

Before too long, Wang Xi rushed back in. He took a deep breath. "Your Highness, it's a mess out there," he whispered. "The guards on patrol discovered that a man had snuck into Concubine Lu's tent. They presumed it was an assassin, but i-it turned out it was an old acquaintance of Concubine Lu's…"

Li Yu was taken aback.

Upon consideration, Wang Xi's words held deep implications. Concubine Lu was the mother of the eighth and youngest prince, and she'd also attended the hunting festival. Why would an old acquaintance of a concubine with a promising future suddenly appear right under the emperor's watchful eyes?

What's more, the concubines who came with the emperor to the hunting grounds had their own tents at night, but they were still all concentrated in one area. Concubine Lu's was in the innermost part; it was guarded by servants and palace attendants in shifts, and several troops of guards stood on the outside. A skilled master would struggle to sneak in, much less a random acquaintance—and they had done it unnoticed. That was quite suspicious.

What kind of old acquaintance had to come to the hunting grounds during the festival and sneak into someone's tent in the middle of the night?

Li Yu thought of a melodramatic possibility. No way! Was the so-called acquaintance actually Concubine Lu's lover and they were having a secret date? Was he able to sneak in so smoothly because Concubine Lu was acting from the inside? How else could you explain how long it took the guards to notice?

In ancient times, it was taboo for a woman and a man to be alone together. If the emperor's consort was found with an unfamiliar man, she would either be sentenced to death or cast to the cold palace. Concubine Lu and the man were "old acquaintances"—wasn't that basically proof she was cheating on the emperor?

When Li Yu heard the shouts of "Assassin!" outside, he really thought it must be an assassin sent by the sixth prince, or that the assassin

must at least be related to him in some way…but instead, it was just Concubine Lu cheating on the emperor?

Wang Xi was very considerate toward the emperor. He called the man the concubine's "acquaintance" and didn't mention anything about cheating or the circumstances under which the man was discovered… It took Li Yu a moment to realize what he meant, almost like Sibao.

They hadn't caught any assassins; they had caught two lovers in the act.

This didn't happen in the novel. This was a common plot in palace novels, though, so Li Yu wasn't sure if Concubine Lu's affair was real or if she was being framed by someone else.

Either way, a man had been found in her tent. The emperor must be furious.

"Tianchi, do you want to go take a look?" Li Yu wasn't sure himself.

Prince Jing slowly shook his head. At a time like this, the emperor would definitely want as few people there as possible. If a prince rushed over, he would embarrass the emperor instead of being a comforting presence.

But it would also seem rude if Prince Jing didn't show any concern.

What should they do?

…*Got it!* Li Yu's gaze landed on Dabao.

Dabao was currently sleeping soundly, dreaming of fish food and huge chicken legs. Something suddenly touched his cheek. Opening his eyes, he found that his fish father was smiling at him.

Dabao rubbed his eyes and sat up. Still smiling, Li Yu said, “I’m sorry for waking you up, Dabao. But can you help Daddy out with something urgent?”

Dabao was the oldest, and he had to protect both his brothers and his dads. He quickly said, “Yes!”

Li Yu met Prince Jing’s eyes and picked Dabao up, and they all headed toward the emperor’s dragon tent together.

Head Eunuch Luo was anxiously pacing around outside. The emperor was so outraged with Concubine Lu that he refused to drink a sip of water and wouldn’t see the imperial physician. When Head Eunuch Luo saw Prince Jing and his consort come with their little heir, his eyes lit up and he ran in to report it.

Li Yu and Prince Jing waited outside.

Not long after, the sixth prince arrived as well.

Soon, Head Eunuch Luo let Prince Jing’s family go in, but he didn’t so much as mention the sixth prince.

Li Yu and Prince Jing entered the dragon tent. It had been so bustling and lively earlier during the day, but now the tent was empty. The ground was a mess, with fragments of cups and bowls scattered all around. The emperor sat on the dragon throne, alone, with a dejected air about him. It looked like he’d aged several years since they’d last seen him. The emperor had already interrogated Concubine Lu, and she was now confined somewhere alone.

The appearance of a strange man in his young consort’s tent had dealt the emperor a heavy blow. He was in a terrible mood. “What are you doing here?” he demanded rudely.

He’d had to send away a bunch of concubines earlier. Was Prince Jing here to hassle him now as well?

Li Yu spoke on Prince Jing’s behalf. “Royal Father, Dabao started to miss you in the middle of the night and wouldn’t stop crying for you. In the end, we had to bring him to see you.”

Fish Father had already told Dabao that his grandpa was in a bad mood, so he hurriedly reached out with his chubby little arms. The emperor’s emotions were complicated right now, but he loved this child; he had Luo Ruisheng bring Dabao over.

Dabao kept his arms out the entire time, and when he arrived at the emperor’s lap, he wrapped the emperor up in a hug and patted him gently with one hand.

“Grandpa, hug,” Dabao said in his soft voice.

The emperor suddenly had the urge to cry.

Li Yu and Prince Jing watched the emperor nervously, worried that Dabao might make the angry emperor even more unhappy. But this was also the only way to get the emperor to take care of himself at a time like this.

“You can all go. Dabao can stay.” The emperor waved his hand, not wanting his son to see him so dispirited.

Prince Jing and Li Yu looked at each other, then exited the tent with Head Eunuch Luo.

Soon, snacks and tea were brought into the tent, and Dabao’s giggling could be heard from inside. Prince Jing, Li Yu, and Head Eunuch Luo all felt relieved.

The next day, the emperor was in high spirits. Though what had happened was unpleasant, it was a private matter, so the emperor had sent Concubine Lu back to the palace during the night. He didn't plan on revealing too much in front of the princes and the ministers, so the hunting festival continued.

But before the second hunt started, Prince Li of the Imperial Clan Court[1] arrived in a rush on his horse and asked to see the emperor, stating that there was something to discuss.

The emperor glanced at all the flags fluttering on the hunting grounds and knew that the hunt very well might be over. Prince Li had heard about Concubine Lu's incident and had come to see what the emperor had to say about it.

Concubine Lu was the eighth prince's mother. After all this, what was the eighth prince supposed to do?

Not to mention that if this man was an old acquaintance of Concubine Lu's, she must have known him before she entered the palace. As for whether or not they kept in contact after she entered the palace…the two of them had been in the same tent. This cast some doubts on the eighth prince's parentage.

Prince Li tried his best to persuade the emperor. "Your Majesty, the imperial bloodline cannot be tainted. Please make a decision." He had brought two elderly imperial physicians along with him.

As the emperor's younger brother and the head of the Imperial Clan Court, Prince Li was in charge of royal family affairs. It was obvious that he'd come here to ask the emperor for permission to test the eighth prince's true heritage.

Although the royal family had a method for testing this, it was secret. It could only be used when the legitimacy of a member of the royal family came under doubt, and with the emperor's permission. This caution was to keep the method confidential, so it couldn't be exploited by others.

The emperor hesitated for a moment. But Concubine Lu's actions did make him suspicious. If Prince Li hadn't come now, he would have sought him out once he returned to the palace anyway.

Since they were already at this point, they might as well test it. If he dragged it on for too long, perhaps the eighth prince himself would start having doubts too.

The emperor was about to agree when Prince Li knelt and took out a document from his sleeves.

"Your Majesty, to be honest, there's another important matter. The night before I came, this somehow appeared on my desk in my study. I didn't believe it at first, but when I heard that something had happened at the hunting festival, I felt it was suspicious."

Prince Li presented the document. The emperor took it and glanced over it.

It was a letter to Prince Li, revealing two secrets: one was that Concubine Lu was having an affair, and the other was that Prince Jing's sons weren't his biological children.

The letter contained the name and place of birth of the person Concubine Lu was having an affair with, and certain suspicious aspects of Prince Jing's children.

As the head of the Imperial Clan Court, Prince Li received at least eight hundred requests a day. There was no shortage of baseless rumors; if

he believed everything he received, he wouldn't have time to do anything else. He'd intended to dismiss it at first, but when he heard about Concubine Lu's affair at the hunting grounds and started looking into the man's identity, Prince Li's heart sank.

Most of the information about Concubine Lu in the letter was true. What about Prince Jing, then?

Prince Li thought about how much the emperor had come to care for Prince Jing's son, as well as his expectations for Prince Jing himself. If the letter was true, how could he sit still? He hurried over, not only for the sake of the eighth prince but for the emperor as well.

"What should we do, Your Majesty?" Prince Li thought it was better to kill an innocent than to accidentally let the guilty go. Since they were already doing the test, why not test Prince Jing's son as well?

According to the letter, Prince Jing had four sons while he was at the western border. It was well-known that people who were born mute could pass it on to their children; the fact that none of Prince Jing's sons were afflicted with the same condition was suspicious by itself. Disregarding everything else, Prince Li agreed with that one point.

The emperor's face darkened as he kept reading. Prince Li was afraid that the emperor would be angry at him, but the emperor didn't do anything to him even after he finished reading the letter.

"I understand," he said. "You can go. Don't speak of this to anyone."

Prince Li left, heart beating fast. It was minutes later that he remembered the emperor hadn't made a decision on the eighth prince yet.

The emperor read the letter a couple of times, thinking about the way Dabao cared for him, and came to a conclusion. He ordered Luo Ruisheng

to summon Prince Jing to the dragon tent as soon as possible.

"Tianchi, you have to be careful…" Li Yu glanced at their surroundings and wrote a "six" in Prince Jing's palm. Concubine Lu's incident, Prince Li's appearance…he felt like the sixth prince had a hand in both.

Prince Jing understood; he had the same suspicions, but he wanted Li Yu to wait for him without worrying. Prince Li was the head of the Imperial Clan Court. If he came rushing over from the palace, that meant that there must be some urgency to the situation. He'd passed by Prince Li earlier, and Prince Li hadn't been able to meet his eyes. Prince Jing was almost certain that Prince Li's business was related to him.

When he entered the dragon tent, a folded document came flying at his head.

Prince Jing was alert and could tell that the document wouldn't reach him. Instead, it fell to the floor half a foot away from him.

Prince Jing could sense the emperor's rage. He picked up the document and looked over it.

One glance was all it took for him to know the sixth prince's plan.

As it turned out, Concubine Lu was only bait; she was being used to draw the emperor's attention onto the children.

Since there weren't many confidants around the sixth prince, it was difficult for Prince Jing to send someone to keep an eye on him. The sixth prince was cunning and only trusted himself, so it was impossible to know the precise details of whatever he was planning.

But since Prince Li had rushed here overnight with imperial physicians, it meant they intended to test the legitimacy of the children,

right?

Without Concubine Lu, the emperor might not have believed what the letter said, but because Concubine Lu's betrayal came first, the emperor was more sensitive to matters like these. He would definitely have all the children tested. That was the purpose of the document.

Prince Jing was waiting for the emperor's announcement. Instead, though, to his surprise, the dissatisfied emperor said, "Tianchi, someone wants to harm Dabao. Do you know who it is?"

The emperor hadn't been tricked by the letter at all. Instead, he wanted to protect Dabao!

Chapter 116:
Fish Hide and Seek

IF IT HAD BEEN any of his other grandchildren, the emperor might not have been so concerned—he would have most likely taken the opportunity to have them tested. People were always suspicious of people or things they weren't familiar with. But the emperor remembered that three of Prince Jing's children looked a great deal like Prince Jing when he was younger, and the last one looked like the consort. He wasn't blind! How could he doubt something so obvious?

What made him the most concerned was the identity of the person who had given Prince Li this information. Concubine Lu's affair was a scandal, and the emperor had ordered Luo Ruisheng to suppress any news of it. How had Prince Li found out?

The trust the emperor had in Prince Li didn't develop overnight; it had accumulated slowly since they were children. Otherwise, he would never have let this younger brother of his take over the Imperial Clan Court and handle the royal family affairs. He was sure that this wasn't some plot of Prince Li's, so someone must have leaked the news to him.

First there was an incriminating letter; then Prince Li learned of Concubine Lu's affair. He would naturally take the letter seriously, and even come to the hunting grounds to talk to the emperor. Under most circumstances, the emperor would listen to Prince Li. If the emperor hadn't been very familiar with Prince Jing's children, it was likely that Prince Jing's children and the eighth prince would be tested.

And then what would happen? The informant already wrote it clearly in the letter: they wanted to prove that the children weren't Prince Jing's and thus not part of the royal bloodline!

The emperor had fought for the throne before, and he knew what sorts of underhanded methods one could use to do it. But that was what also made him angry.

No matter what the result of the eighth prince's test was, the emperor would always feel a little uncomfortable around him because of Concubine Lu. If there was anything amiss with Prince Jing's children, then it was probably over for Prince Jing too.

What a vicious plan, to kill two birds with one stone. If it had succeeded, both the eighth prince and Prince Jing would be out of the picture.

Fortunately, he trusted the children, so he saw through this malicious plot. Otherwise, if he had been deceived, what would have happened to Dabao? The emperor was too afraid to continue with that train of thought.

"Tianchi, do you have any ideas?" he asked Prince Jing, hoping that his son would notice the same thing he did.

Prince Jing had thought it over several times already. He realized that the emperor's protectiveness over Dabao meant he would have to change up his plan a little.

Prince Jing gave it some thought and asked for a brush and paper from the emperor. He quickly wrote: *Using Concubine Lu as bait, someone is trying to frame me and Dabao.*

The emperor nodded. Prince Jing clearly had some brain cells.

Since the emperor asked, Prince Jing let him know about the previous incident. A couple of days ago, a thief had snuck into his manor, wanting to take Dabao's blood, but had taken someone else's by mistake instead.

Prince Jing explained it cleverly so that the emperor wouldn't notice he was using the enemy's plan against them. As for who was behind the thief, Prince Jing knew that he would seem suspicious if he spoke the truth outright. He trusted the emperor to work out who would reap the most reward from this plan.

The emperor finally understood why Dabao and Prince Jing were being framed, despite looking so obviously similar. From what Prince Jing said, it was clear that this was a long-standing plot.

Then what about Concubine Lu?

The emperor recalled Concubine Lu begging him on her knees. They had indeed caught a strange man in her tent, and she had admitted that she'd known this man when she was a child, but she promised again and again that they had never had any further contact after she entered the palace. She truly didn't know why he'd suddenly appeared in the hunting grounds or why he had entered her tent. Was something amiss with that whole incident as well?

It was a good thing he hadn't killed anyone in his fury last night, otherwise there'd be nobody to verify any of it.

Concubine Lu had been sent back to the palace overnight. The emperor decided to interrogate the man, who'd been beaten within an inch of his life by the guards, for some more clues.

"Stay here, there's no need to go back," he told Prince Jing. "I'll find out the truth."

It wasn’t because the emperor didn’t trust Prince Jing, but because he wanted to mislead those behind the scenes into a false sense of security. If they thought Prince Jing had been locked up, they could continue their plan.

Prince Jing understood that the emperor had his own plans. He quickly knelt down.

“Tianchi, what’s wrong?” The emperor didn’t understand what Prince Jing meant by this.

Prince Jing pointed in the direction of his own tent and looked at the emperor.

The emperor furrowed his brow. “Are you worried about Li Yu and the children? Don’t worry, I’ll have Luo Ruisheng pass along a message for you.”

Prince Jing slowly shook his head. Not just worried.

The emperor recalled the intimacy between Prince Jing and his consort and helplessly said, “Then write a letter yourself and have Luo Ruisheng bring it over with an item of yours as proof. That ought to be fine, right?”

Prince Jing hesitated for a moment but shook his head again.

“…Then what do you want?” The emperor was a little annoyed that he couldn’t get it right, and he raised his voice without noticing. “Should I bring them over and reunite you all, is that enough for you?”

The emperor wasn’t serious, but Prince Jing clasped his hands together and thanked him!

The emperor almost exploded from anger, but he waved his hand and said, “Fine, I’ll have Luo Ruisheng personally make the trip.”

Head Eunuch Luo agreed immediately and asked Prince Jing if there was anything he wanted him to take with him.

Prince Jing lowered his head and pulled out a silver bead on a red string from his collar.

Though the emperor was annoyed and didn't want to show that he cared, he caught a glimpse of more than one object hanging around Prince Jing's neck. In addition to the silver bead, there was also…something that looked like a round rock. *What the hell is that?*

Prince Jing was about to hand over the silver bead, but after a moment, he took it back and kept kneeling.

"Can you make up your mind?" the emperor asked impatiently.

Prince Jing's eyes flashed, asking the emperor for his forgiveness, and made the request he actually wanted.

While Prince Jing went to see the emperor, Li Yu stayed in the tent with the children. He wasn't used to not having anyone he could discuss matters with.

Even though they didn't really know how to walk, a small tent wasn't enough to contain their childlike playfulness. Li Yu had no choice but to play with them to distract them—as well as to distract himself.

Prince Jing didn't return for a long time, and Li Yu felt the worry and panic from when he was left alone in the other residence start to bubble up again.

Stay steady. You have to trust him. You can't do anything impulsive…

Li Yu had to take a deep breath to calm himself down.

"Daddy!" Sibao's little voice piped up.

Coming back to his senses, Li Yu found that the children were holding tightly onto the edges of his clothes. *You still have the kids. Don't panic.*

Li Yu smiled and picked up each one, kissing them. "Do you want to play hide-and-seek or tug-of-war?"

The children looked at each other. Tug-of-war wasn't very interesting, because whichever side Fish Daddy was on would win. They unanimously decided on hide-and-seek!

Li Yu had one child cover his eyes with a handkerchief while he and the others went to hide. Since they couldn't quite walk, Li Yu didn't make it hard for them; he barely hid before they found him.

Soon, it was his turn to seek.

Li Yu was blindfolded by Erbao and Sanbao. The children didn't know how to tie a knot, but Dabao had an idea: he pulled Wang Xi over to help. Wang-gonggong covered his mouth and laughed, then helped them tie the blindfold.

Dabao, Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao split up. If they couldn't walk fast, they'd crawl. If they couldn't crawl fast, they'd roll.

Dabao headed straight for the curtain, lifted it up, and hid behind it. Erbao and Sanbao found a bamboo basket and got into it at the same time, but their heads collided, and they realized this wasn't a good spot. Then they found a table and both got under it, but when they bonked their heads together again they decided it still wasn't quite right…

The two children rubbed their foreheads and looked at each other before coming to a sudden realization. One hid under the table while the other hid in the bamboo basket.

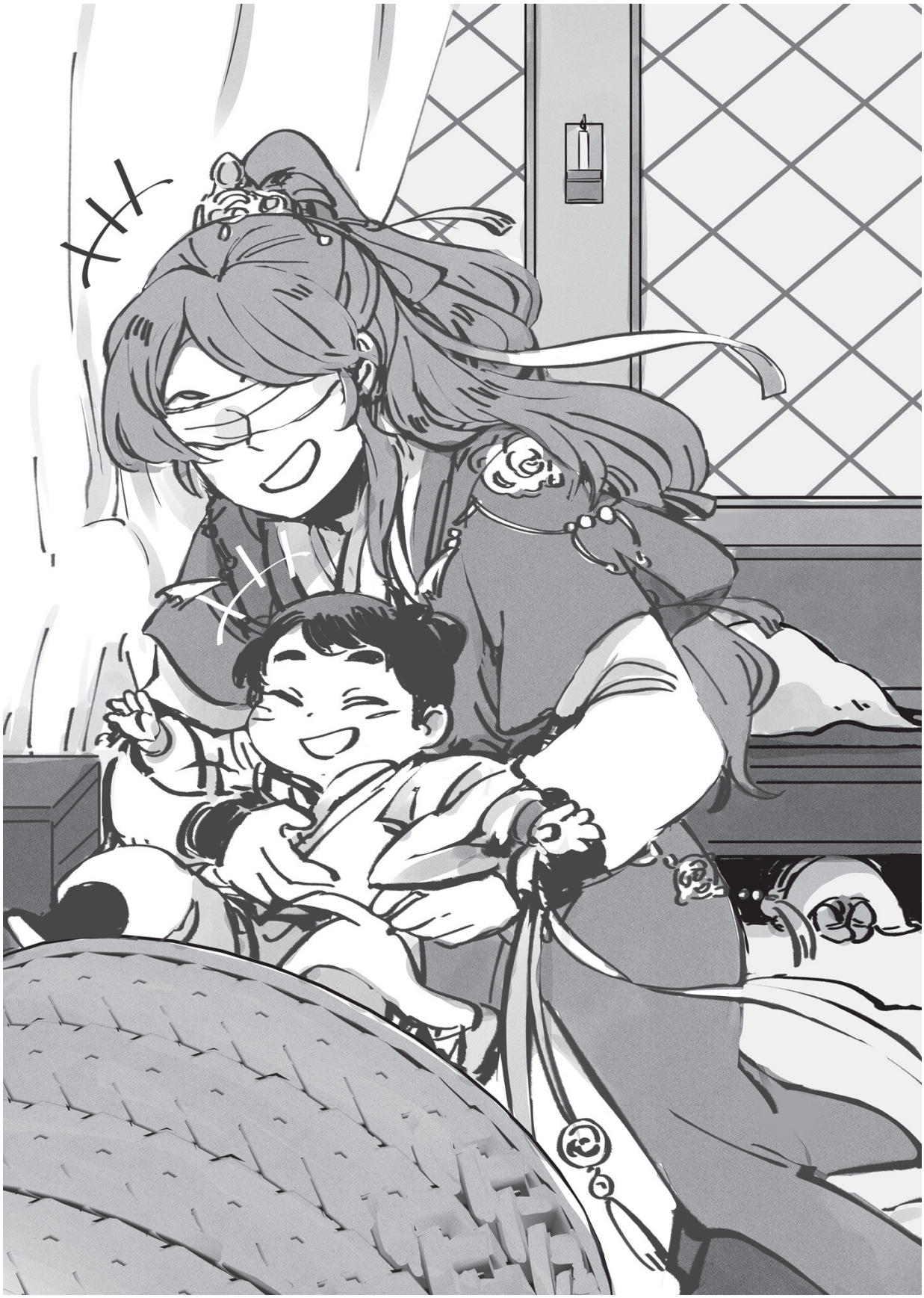
Sibao looked around, lifted the brocade quilt, and lay under it.

Li Yu counted from one to ten and started his search. He'd barely pulled the handkerchief down when he saw that the curtain had a bulge for some reason, the bamboo basket that had been standing before was knocked over, revealing half a butt, and someone was hiding just his head under the table.

Li Yu laughed and coughed lightly. To make it more exciting, he put the handkerchief back on his face before trying to capture the children.

"Daddy can find you even if he's blindfolded!" he declared mightily.

He pulled the children out from under the bamboo basket and table, then pushed the curtain aside suddenly. The children's shrieks and laughs rose and fell.



Li Yu had already found three of them and was on his way to finding the fourth. It wasn't a big tent—the only place left was the bed. Confident, Li Yu started feeling his way toward the bed.

Suddenly, he felt something tall, large, and firm. What was something like that doing in the tent?

The children's voices became louder, and they all called happily, "Daddy!"

Li Yu felt an arm and a leg. He hurriedly took off the handkerchief that was covering his eyes, but before he could get a clear look, he was wrapped up in a heated kiss.

Li Yu was startled, but when he recognized Prince Jing's breathing, he immediately surrendered, almost drowning in the sudden warmth. The children watched as their fish father turned into a steamed fish.

It was fine, they were all family anyway. Kissing wasn't a big deal, Li Yu tried to tell himself.

He and Prince Jing had only been separated for a little while, so why were they clinging to each other like they'd been apart for ages?

Of course, Li Yu had no idea that earlier, when the emperor asked Prince Jing if he knew anything about the situation, it had felt to Prince Jing like he was standing on the edge of a cliff. All it would take was one wrong step to be shattered to pieces. Despite all that, Prince Jing had survived—he'd even gained the emperor's trust. Of course he was relieved when he saw Li Yu again.

But he wouldn't tell Li Yu this.

"Why are you dressed like that?" Li Yu hugged Prince Jing's arm. Prince Jing had changed into a guard's outfit, which was completely

different from what he was wearing when he left. That was why Li Yu hadn't been able to tell who he was just by touch.

Prince Jing's lips quirked into a smile and he succinctly wrote down what happened for Li Yu.

"So Royal Father…wants us to go to him?" Li Yu asked, surprised.

Prince Jing nodded. It was best to get moving as soon as possible so the news wouldn't get out.

Li Yu was confused. Since they were going to meet in the emperor's tent anyway, why did Prince Jing come back? He could have just sent someone over to fetch them. And why was he wearing the clothes of a guard?

Li Yu didn't ask, but the question showed on his face.

Prince Jing held Li Yu's hand under his sleeve and pointed at his nose, smiling.

Because of him?

Li Yu's heart suddenly felt warm. Why did he make this trip? Wasn't it because he was worried about his and the children's safety? Prince Jing had hidden his identity and asked the emperor for permission just to pick them up.

He was so moved that he was getting sniffly, but he was still too embarrassed to ask for another kiss in front of the children. Even so, he was very happy that Prince Jing was so attentive. He held Prince Jing's hand tightly and swung it back and forth a little, trying to demonstrate that he'd remember this forever.

Li Yu and Wang Xi picked up the children and were about to leave but found that one of them was missing. It turned out that Sibao, hiding in the quilt, had fallen asleep waiting for his fish father to find him. Prince Jing, in his guard disguise, bent down to pick up Sibao from the quilt and guarded him securely.

The group didn't get far before they bumped into the sixth prince.

"Did something happen, Consort, for you to be in such a hurry? Ah, and where's Fifth Royal Brother?"

It seemed like the sixth prince had just happened to run into Li Yu while taking a walk and asked him a very normal question. But Li Yu knew that this was a test. If he hesitated for too long or if the sixth prince realized that the guard next to him was Prince Jing, it was over. The image the emperor had crafted of being furious at Prince Jing would be shattered.

How should he answer to avoid suspicion? And how could he get rid of the sixth prince as soon as possible?

Luckily, Wang Xi rushed to defend his master and answer for Li Yu. "Your Highness, Prince Jing hasn't returned yet, and the consort would like to see what's going on."

Everyone knew that after Prince Li's secret discussion with the emperor, the emperor had called for Prince Jing. It was true that there'd been no news since then, so what Wang Xi said was believable.

"He really hasn't come back yet?" The sixth prince's eyes lit up. Did his plan work? Was the emperor keeping Prince Jing there because he was suspicious of him?

Li Yu nodded with some difficulty.

Prince Jing quietly tightened his grip on his sword. If the sixth prince dared to try and harm Xiaoyu, he would move first to protect him.

Luckily, the sixth prince was completely focused on Xiaoyu and the children—with Wang Xi interfering too, he failed to notice anything strange about the guard, preoccupied with trying to pry more information from the consort.

Everyone was wrapped up in their own thoughts. Li Yu was just trying to figure out how to make a quick, natural getaway when Dabao, who was holding his hand, suddenly started crying, “Dad, want Daddy!”

Li Yu suddenly had an idea and picked up Dabao to comfort him, saying, “Dabao, don’t cry. I’ll take you to see him now!”

Li Yu nodded at the sixth prince and led Dabao away along with Wang-gonggong—with Prince Jing right on their heels!

Chapter 117:
Brave Fish Babies

THOUGH THE SIXTH PRINCE found it strange that Prince Jing's consort had run off so quickly and disappeared in the blink of an eye, he wasn't particularly close to the new male consort. He was too thrilled over the fact that Prince Jing still hadn't returned, and he quickly forgot any confusion.

He didn't try contacting his people again. It would be best to let everything progress as planned; sending a letter now would be unwise.

At most, it would take two days for a conclusion to be reached.

The sixth prince walked toward his tent, happy with himself.

When he entered, he saw his consort looking anxious. He felt like this was an unlucky sign. In the past, he'd needed to spend a lot of time pandering to her to earn the support of the Marquis of Dingbei and her family, and for the sake of his unborn child. She was sensitive during her pregnancy and he'd long since lost his patience with her, but since he was in a good mood, he showed her a rare, comforting smile.

"Get some rest, don't tire yourself out too much," he told her gently.

His consort, Lady Liang, was unused to this kind of affection. The sixth prince had treated her coldly for a few months now, but Lady Liang had nowhere to vent her suffering. She knew this child was incredibly important to the sixth prince. The entire family, including herself, had hoped for a son, but the imperial physician said it would be a daughter. Several physicians all said the same. When the sixth prince found out, he didn't blame her, but he did immediately acquire a couple of beautiful

concubines, telling her bluntly that in this current situation, he needed a son as soon as possible to prepare for the future.

She couldn’t blame anyone else for what was going on in her own womb, and her own family supported the sixth prince’s decision, asking her to be patient and tolerant. Each day, Lady Liang’s mood plummeted further and further, and she had no one to confide in. Before she was married, she’d been a lively girl. Now her mental state was quite delicate, and she would shed tears at the drop of a hat. The sixth prince often visited his other concubines and only came to see her occasionally to keep up the appearance of a loving couple.

She couldn’t tell if she was compatible with the sixth prince, but she was jealous when she saw how much Prince Jing, a prince just like her husband, doted on his consort.

The sixth prince seldom laughed and talked with her like he was now, and she wholeheartedly hoped that such days could continue a little longer.

Li Yu, Prince Jing, and Wang Xi continued walking for a while to confirm that the sixth prince wasn’t following them before they finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Thank goodness for Dabao!

Li Yu smiled and picked him up. Dabao had already stopped crying, his dark, grapelike eyes sparkling as he turned his head to look at his fish dad and laughed. Li Yu was surprised. He knew Dabao was smarter than the other children and could understand what the adults were talking about. Had he…

“Dabao, did you do that on purpose?” Li Yu asked quietly, smiling as he pressed Dabao’s cheek against his own.

Dabao’s fat little finger pointed at the figure in the distance. “He’s bad!”

The sixth prince usually hid his true self well, and most people couldn’t tell what he was thinking. But Dabao, as one of the emperor’s favorites, was often taken to Qianqing Palace, where he’d regularly witnessed the sixth prince’s greetings to the emperor.

Of course the sixth prince wouldn’t do anything untoward in front of the emperor, but when the emperor wasn’t paying attention, the sixth prince’s gaze on Dabao always turned poisonous. Dabao wasn’t even a year old yet, and so the sixth prince treated him like an ordinary baby his age and never bothered to conceal his disgust for the child.

But Dabao wasn’t an ordinary baby. Before he became a human baby, he’d spent ten months as a young fish. Fish matured faster than humans, and Dabao already understood a lot of things about the world. The sixth prince’s unkind gaze made Dabao uncomfortable, and he’d committed to memory the fact that the sixth prince was a bad man.

Of course, Dabao *was* still just a child. In the face of a bad guy who made him uncomfortable, his instinct was to get away. The reason he’d cried so hard earlier was to get his fish dad to stay farther away from the bad guy.

Though it was an accident, Dabao was happy that he could finally protect his fish dad for once!

Prince Jing reached over and rubbed his head. Dabao’s face turned red with elation. Daddy Prince Jing rubbed his head!

Li Yu rewarded Dabao with kissies, determined to cover half of Dabao's face with saliva. Li Yu was in the middle of planting kisses when his vision blurred and he suddenly saw Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao coming over, their chubby little faces wobbling in front of him.

When it came to kissies, one should worry less about a lack of them, and more about evenly distributing them![2]

Li Yu resisted the urge to laugh and kissed all of them. "Everyone, be good!"

The family of six, along with Wang Xi, quickly headed toward the dragon tent.

The emperor had been waiting for a long time. When he saw Prince Jing and Li Yu arrive with their children, he smiled.

"Are you finally at ease?" he teased. He was making fun of the way Prince Jing had begged him earlier, and Prince Jing took it silently.

Li Yu looked back and forth between the emperor and Prince Jing, unbearably curious. Though Prince Jing didn't seem to be disgruntled, he put Dabao down. Dabao, king of smoothing situations over, hit the ground and immediately started toddling over to Emperor Grandpa.

The emperor was nonchalant about making jibes at his son, but as soon as he saw his grandson he was elated. He changed the topic immediately. "Doesn't it seem like Dabao is walking much more steadily now?"

Li Yu couldn't believe it. Dabao wasn't. Dabao really wasn't! Emperor, you just saw him a couple of hours ago! Don't tell such blatant lies!

After a great stumbling ordeal, Dabao finally reached the emperor and grabbed the hem of the dragon robe. The emperor picked him up, smiling. With his chubby little grandson in his arms, the emperor felt bitter hatred toward those who were trying to plot against Dabao.

If Prince Jing fell out of favor and the eighth prince was spurned, who would benefit?

The emperor already knew the answer, but that person had never revealed such ambitions before—didn't that prove that he knew how to hide and had been putting on an act in front of him all these years? He'd have to force him to make a move and catch him in the act, so there'd be no space for him to argue.

The emperor had thought of a thorough plan already, but it required the cooperation of Prince Jing's family.

"Dabao, can you help Grandpa with something?" the emperor asked, smiling. He could have just ordered an edict, but he wanted to explain it to Dabao personally.

Dabao blinked. He realized that adults liked it when he helped. Fish Dad said it a lot, and Grandpa said it too. Dabao loved Fish Dad and Grandpa, so of course he was willing. Dabao patted his small chest. "Okay!"

The emperor's eyes filled with a smile, and he continued to tease, "Is it okay even if it hurts?"

Dabao scrunched up his little chubby face. Fish Dad had taught him before that he had to keep his word. Dabao was afraid of pain, but he couldn't take it back now.

Dabao bravely nodded. "Okay."

Li Yu had some idea of what the plan was, but he and Prince Jing couldn't really do anything about it, since this was the emperor's will. The children had been born at the western border, so the gossip surrounding them was inevitable. The emperor was doing all this to silence those with harmful intentions.

He also knew that the pain the emperor was talking about wasn't really that painful, but as a father, it was extremely difficult for Li Yu.

The emperor called over the imperial physician, and Li Yu turned away. Prince Jing held his hand under their sleeves, and Li Yu pinched his hand hard, as if he were angry. But Prince Jing's brow didn't even twitch.

The emperor was worried that Dabao would be afraid, so he held him in his lap.

When Head Eunuch Luo came over to take Dabao's blood, the emperor stared at him coldly the entire time. Luo Ruisheng had been in his current position for many years now, but his fingers still trembled slightly, seeming even more nervous than Prince Jing's heir in the emperor's lap.

Dabao might have said he wasn't afraid, but he still was. He closed his eyes when he saw the needle. But in the end, all that happened was a prick to his finger. Dabao thought it wasn't too bad after all—much better than the time he tried to eat an unpeeled lychee.

But when he opened his eyes and looked around, he saw that Fish Dad's eyes were reddened, while Grandpa and Daddy Prince Jing looked like they wanted to hit someone. Weird…

"Your Majesty," Head Eunuch Luo asked bravely, "what about the other gongzis?"

Li Yu knew that he was just doing his job, but he practically wanted to strangle him. Watching their older brother get poked with a needle had made the other babies frightened. They didn't dare to even breathe.

The emperor was just about to shake his head when Dabao hurriedly spoke up: "Grandpa, me!"

Dabao knew that it was still going to hurt a little, and his younger brothers might not be as good at enduring it as he was. If Grandpa needed to poke someone, Dabao would do it for his brothers!

Dabao bravely stuck out another finger.

The smile in the emperor's eyes grew stronger. "All right."

Luo Ruisheng paused. He didn't know this was a possibility.

Dabao thought he was going to be poked again and closed his eyes, scared. But nothing happened; Luo-gonggong just took a couple more drops of blood from his already-pricked finger. Then the emperor asked for a strip of cloth and personally wrapped it thickly around Dabao's finger.

When Dabao was returned to Li Yu, Li Yu hugged him, heart aching. The other babies didn't try to clamor for their fish dad's hug anymore; with Sibao in the lead, they all blew on Dabao's bandaged finger. It wouldn't hurt anymore if they blew on it!

The emperor's heart softened as he watched the children. Then he ordered Luo Ruisheng to go fetch the eighth prince.

On the day of Concubine Lu's incident, the eighth prince and the seventh prince had been staying in the same tent. There was a lot of yelling that night, and the eighth prince thought it was too noisy, but nobody would tell him what was going on. Ever since then, he hadn't been able to see his mother, and even the seventh prince, who he was normally quite close with,

had been avoiding him. The only person kind enough to tell him anything was the sixth prince. He informed him that his mother had been caught with a strange man at night, which left the eighth prince stunned.

He was only seven years old, but he understood what kind of crime this was. His mother had been urgently sent back to the palace, and the servants were all whispering behind his back. When the emperor asked him to be tested, the eighth prince gritted his teeth and agreed. This was the only way to find out who he really was.

The emperor got everything ready and had Luo Ruisheng summon the princes, Prince Li, a couple of important ministers, and the elders of the royal family to the dragon tent.

“Prince Li has received a secret report that casts doubt on the royal bloodline,” the emperor announced. “I have decided to use the secret method to verify the truth of this accusation.”

He didn’t mention the secret letter or who was to be tested, only that the blood had already been collected. He ordered the imperial physician who knew the secret method to test the blood immediately.

The elders and ministers were shocked. For one thing, the emperor didn’t explain whose bloodline was under suspicion, and for another, the jade bottles that held the blood the imperial physician was to test had nothing on them but some strange marks, so nobody could tell who they belonged to.

Those marks were Li Yu’s loving contribution. After he learned about the emperor’s plan, Li Yu suggested replacing names with marks so only the emperor knew which was which.

The sixth prince was keenly anticipating the emperor’s furious reaction after the results were revealed, but he hadn’t been expecting the emperor to use this method.

Normally, the imperial physician would personally extract the blood to test it, which meant that he would know whose it was. But with the emperor’s method, the imperial physician couldn’t tell who the blood belonged to—it was clear that the emperor was wary of the imperial physician as well.

The safest way to fake the test results would be to bribe the imperial physician.

There weren’t many imperial physicians who knew the secret method. But because Consort Zhang, the sixth prince’s mother, had saved the life of a certain Imperial Physician Pan in the past, they were able to convince him to test the “little heir’s” blood they had retrieved from Prince Jing’s manor. The sixth prince was only able to smoothly launch this battle after Imperial Physician Pan adamantly promised him that the young shizi was definitely not part of the royal bloodline.

The imperial physician not knowing whose blood was in which bottle wasn’t really a problem for the sixth prince, since he had already confirmed that Prince Jing’s shizi wasn’t really his. But the sixth prince was slightly suspicious as to why the emperor had decided to arrange things this way.

“Wang Xi, what should we do?”

The sixth prince caught sight of Prince Jing’s consort holding the “hurt” little shizi, anxiously discussing plans with Wang Xi.

The emperor had summoned all the princes except the second and third, but there was no sign of Prince Jing either. It seemed the emperor was

still holding on to Prince Jing, leaving his consort panicked.

The sixth prince ordered his servant to go over and eavesdrop. The consort was quite vigilant, so the servant couldn't get too close, but he heard the consort say the phrases "can't find him" and "no way to switch them."

The sixth prince mulled over this. It seemed the consort was distraught. The consort definitely knew where the little shizi came from. In light of the emperor's arrangements, the sixth prince wasn't panicked; the ones who should be panicking were Prince Jing's family…

So, these measures the emperor had taken were most likely to guard against Prince Jing and to prevent him from meddling. The sixth prince had nothing to worry about. He was sure he'd read the emperor like an open book, so he settled down and waited for the results.

On the other hand, the sixth prince's ally, Imperial Physician Pan, was a little anxious.

He had to be extremely cautious when the royal bloodline was involved. Several imperial physicians had separately tested the blood, and when they compared their results, Imperial Physician Pan came to the sudden realization that all blood samples were of the royal bloodline!

Why was it different from the result the sixth prince wanted? Imperial Physician Pan was dumbfounded. This concerned the sixth prince's career and future. No matter what, Imperial Physician Pan had to let the sixth prince know.

Claiming he felt unwell and needed to wash his hands, he slipped out in a panic before the test was completed.

Chapter 118:
Fish Babies Are the Best

IMPERIAL PHYSICIAN PAN hid in an out-of-the-way corner. He'd sent off a pigeon with cloth tied to its feet. He couldn't stay for too long because he'd left saying he was unwell. Just when he was about to lose hope, a man dressed as a servant came up to him.

"Are you insane?" the man scolded, irritated. "Looking for the master at a time like this?"

"I have urgent news to report!" Imperial Physician Pan said. Realizing who this man worked for, he blurted out the entire situation, explaining the results of the test.

This was a huge problem, and the servant couldn't make any decisions himself. He frowned and had the imperial physician wait as he personally reported the news to the sixth prince.

Imperial Physician Pan had no choice but to keep hiding there.

Luckily, the sixth prince was in a small tent not too far away. There was no way he was about to run out to meet Imperial Physician Pan himself, and even if he was close by, he would still make his confidant handle it. When he heard about the situation, the sixth prince was shocked as well.

What was going on? Prince Jing's heir's blood had definitely been tested, so why was there no problem with the results?

…Could it be that Prince Jing had acted before he did? It must be Prince Jing. That was the only explanation!

Prince Jing! Prince Jing again!

The sixth prince unconsciously clenched his fists. He was so close. If Prince Jing made it out of this unscathed, the emperor's trust in him would be absolute, and it would be impossible to make the legitimacy of his children an issue again. Once the heir was recognized by the imperial physicians, Prince Jing's status would only become more secure.

To make the emperor suspicious of the young heir and rope in all the other princes as well, he'd used Concubine Lu as the first step. If he kept hesitating, all the effort he'd put in would only end up in Prince Jing's favor.

He'd made a mistake. He hadn't thought that was possible.

But he'd received the news just in time. It wasn't too late yet. No pain, no gain. Hadn't he spent his entire life scheming for what he wanted? What was one more time?

If Prince Jing could meddle, then why couldn't he? How could he possibly just give up now?

Since he didn't know which bottle contained whose blood…he'd just make sure no one passed the test! That'd still work, right?

The eighth prince's blood must be in one of the bottles. This younger brother of his was already so pitiful, he didn't particularly want to harm him any more than he already had. But if the eighth prince wanted to blame someone, he should blame Prince Jing.

The sixth prince passed along his instructions. His expression hardened as he said, "Have Imperial Physician Pan deal with it as soon as possible."

Once he received the answer, Imperial Physician Pan headed back inside, distressed.

By the time he'd returned to where the other imperial physicians were, Imperial Physician Pan had come up with an idea.

The secret to verifying the royal bloodline all came down to the fact that the founding emperor of the dynasty had once taken a medicine called qilin gold. This medicine wasn't special at first glance, but once a person ingested it, their blood would emit a faint golden light when it came into contact with an herb called dragon vine.

The founding emperor had used this to signify that he bore the Mandate of Heaven, and subsequently passed on the qilin gold effect to his descendants. Although it apparently grew dimmer with each passing generation, the blood of a true royal would still emit a faint golden light after coming in contact with dragon vine.

Thus, the secret method to verifying the bloodline was dragon vine.

The royal family wanted to keep this a secret, so dragon vine had more or less been completely destroyed, and there were only a few plants left growing in the imperial physicians' garden. Imperial Physician Pan knew about dragon vine, and he'd done a lot of research on it. He had a small bottle of medicine in his medicine box with the ability to disrupt the effect of the dragon vine. He had prepared it just in case, but because he didn't know which bottle held the little shizi's blood, he hadn't been able to interfere sooner.

With the sixth prince's order to change everyone's result, he now had a plan in mind.

Imperial Physician Pan dipped a silver needle into the medicine. With a casual flick, he changed the “yes” to a “no.”

As this matter involved royal secrets, there were only a couple of imperial physicians in the tent, and guards were posted outside. While everyone else was busy, he poured his own medicine into all the bottles of blood.

With his task completed, Imperial Physician Pan pretended that he’d just finished his tests and started to compare results with the other imperial physicians. Naturally, he had different results.

Imperial Physician Pan said, “Since we’re doing this for the emperor, how can we give him inconsistent results? Why don’t we all test it again?”

The other imperial physicians were disgruntled, but what he said was reasonable, so they agreed to do it again.

As he watched the others test the blood with his added medicine, Imperial Physician Pan wiped the sweat off his forehead. He’d finally succeeded.

Little did he know that a person behind the tent, responsible for keeping an eye on him, had seen everything he did and recorded it in a book.

This time, the imperial physicians produced completely opposite results. The people the emperor asked them to test were not of royal blood!

This result was extremely shocking. The imperial physicians verified it a few more times and even checked the dragon vine that was used, but there were no obvious problems.

Imperial Physician Pan sighed theatrically. “If we hadn’t retested, I’m afraid someone would have successfully tricked His Majesty.”

The imperial physicians were unable to find anything out of the ordinary, so they could only present the strange results.

When the princes, clan elders, and Prince Li waiting in the dragon tent heard the news, their expressions darkened. The eighth prince's face turned pale, and he started to tremble.

"Your Majesty, this…" While Prince Li was the one who'd proposed the test in the first place, he truly did not expect that neither Prince Jing's heir nor the eighth prince were of royal blood. What a travesty!

"Thank you for checking your work, imperial physicians," said the emperor, suppressing the thunder crackling in his eyes. "Otherwise I might have been kept in the dark forever."

When the sixth prince heard this, his heart skipped a beat, and he checked Prince Jing's consort's reaction.

Li Yu was already on his knees, holding his children tightly in his arms, and had his head buried in their arms. The sixth prince couldn't see his expression, but he could clearly see the consort's trembling hands. He must be afraid because their lies had been exposed.

The sixth prince was elated, but he followed everyone else's example and begged the emperor to calm down.

"There must be an explanation," the emperor said.

As he finished speaking, two groups of guards came into the tent, but instead of seizing the consort and Prince Jing's fake children like the sixth prince thought they would, the guards dragged out Imperial Physician Pan.

Prince Li and the ministers were shocked. Masquerading as part of the royal bloodline was a serious crime, so they expected all those involved

to be dealt with immediately, followed swiftly by several bloody executions. But unexpectedly, the emperor was starting with an imperial physician who seemed to have nothing to do with the situation!

Imperial Physician Pan was scared witless by the fierce guards. Had the emperor somehow found out that he'd interfered with the results?

But nobody had been paying attention to him in the tent when it happened. How would the emperor know?

Imperial Physician Pan tried to bluff. "Your Majesty, what have I done wrong—?"

Before he could even finish his sentence, the emperor chuckled coldly, and a guard forcefully threw a secret report at his face. Another guard took out his medicine box and opened it, removing the specific medicine with frightening accuracy. There was some medicine left in the bottle, as Imperial Physician Pan didn't have time to get rid of it. He'd kept the medicine with him to hide it in plain sight—he'd thought he was being smart.

The emperor ordered the other imperial physicians to look into this medicine first, then the blood that they tested.

After the imperial physicians smelled it and examined it carefully, they were furious. Alumen was present in Imperial Physician Pan's medicinal concoction, which would interfere with the effects of the dragon vine—meaning it would ruin the accuracy of the test.

No wonder their results were all "yes" the first time, except Imperial Physician Pan's, and they turned to "no" after he suggested they retest.

Imperial Physician Pan had obviously set things up!

So, the most recent results were false—

The imperial physicians all changed their tune, afraid the emperor would blame them too.

Prince Li and the ministers hadn't even recovered from the last shock before they were shocked all over again. The eighth prince gazed at the emperor with admiration and gratitude. If not for the emperor, he would have been the victim of a terrible injustice.

The sixth prince's expression had shifted when the emperor ordered the guards to grab Imperial Physician Pan, but before he could grasp what was going on, the situation had changed again: the imperial guards picked out an unassuming servant from the crowd.

It was the servant he'd sent to make emergency contact with Imperial Physician Pan!

Cold sweat from the sixth prince's forehead flowed into his eyes, and his vision turned blurry.

"Whose servant is this?" the emperor asked lightly.

The sixth prince didn't dare move or speak. He could feel the emperor's gaze on him. No matter what he said, if he spoke up, the emperor would arrest him! Since he couldn't think of a way to get out of this, he was just going to stop. The only thought in his mind was to find a way to protect himself.

This particular servant was a distant relative of his mother's. The man's entire family was in his grasp, so he definitely wouldn't betray him. If anything happened, the servant was to take all the blame.

His only fear was that Imperial Physician Pan would point him out after he was caught. But as long as the only accusation came from Imperial Physician Pan, the emperor couldn't do anything to him.

The sixth prince often used letters against others, and so he and Imperial Physician Pan had never used letters to communicate, only spoken word; the same applied to him and this confidant as well. Just like the bribery case, as long as he refused to admit it, he couldn’t be held accountable. No matter how angry the emperor was, he couldn’t punish a prince on the basis of a single person’s testimony.

At most, they might find out that the confidant was his servant, but so what? He knew nothing of this! He had simply been deceived by those under him again!

The emperor had captured Imperial Physician Pan and a servant. Everyone present, including Prince Li, was confused.

“Your Majesty, did this person do something?” Prince Li asked bravely.

The emperor glanced at the sixth prince, but before he could answer, Dabao, who was in Li Yu’s arms, raised his chubby little arm.

“Grandpa!” *Dabao knows the answer!!!*

The emperor was happy to indulge Dabao. He let Li Yu bring him up.

Li Yu had practically begged Prince Jing to let him and Dabao participate in this play, but Dabao wanted to add scenes in the middle! A-and the emperor had even agreed! What could Li Yu do? He had to play along.

The emperor held Dabao in his arms, and Dabao looked down at the dark crowd before him, utterly unafraid.

The emperor was pleased by Dabao’s courage. “Dabao, what do you want to say?” he teased.

Dabao pointed at the man the guards had captured and said clearly, “Grandpa, he’s bad!”

Prince Li was flabbergasted. He’d seen a lot of people accusing others, but he’d never seen one like this! He knew that Prince Jing’s shizi was favored, but he didn’t know that he was so doted on that he’d dare speak so directly in front of the princes!

And the emperor… Prince Li peeked at the emperor’s reaction. He was actually…smiling.

“Do you know him, Dabao?” the emperor asked.

Of course Dabao knew him! This was the bad guy who had snuck into his room before. He remembered him!

Dabao stuck out his thickly wrapped hand and said pitifully, “He, needle, poke…”

Thanks to Dabao, Li Yu recognized the man now too. He muttered in his head, *Son, wake up! This man did threaten your wet nurse and sneak into the manor, but this wasn’t the man who poked you!*

Li Yu had just been thinking that he’d done a great job of playing his two roles: a worried consort and despairing consort, but in the face of Dabao’s sad and pitiful gaze, he was nothing.

The emperor took Dabao’s cue. He was astounded by Dabao’s words and actions, and soon remembered that Prince Jing had mentioned that someone snuck into the manor to take Dabao’s blood. Dabao must have seen and remembered him.

“Dabao is a witness,” the emperor said, “and I have a special witness myself. In the afternoon, Imperial Physician Pan sent off a pigeon informing someone of the results—that all the blood tested belonged to the

royal family. Then, this man told his master of the news. Not long after, the man's master responded with a message to Imperial Physician Pan, ordering him to change all the results."

The emperor recounted the conversation between the confidant and Imperial Physician Pan almost perfectly. The sixth prince had never expected the emperor to know all this as well. He was stupefied.

How had the emperor found this out? If he knew even this, then did he know that the sixth prince was behind it? But what could he do? Before the emperor said anything about his identity, was he supposed to pull the rug out from under his own feet and confess to everything?

There was no way he'd let that happen.

As for Prince Li—initially, he was stunned when he heard the eighth prince and Prince Jing's sons weren't part of the royal bloodline. He'd looked like he'd been struck by lightning. Then, the emperor explained that someone had ordered Imperial Physician Pan to interfere with the results. Prince Li finally came back to his senses and got to the point: "Your Majesty, who was behind Imperial Physician Pan?"

Since the emperor knew almost exactly what the two lackeys had discussed, he probably knew who was behind them too.

But the emperor didn't answer. He remained silent for ten minutes.

During this time, the sixth prince felt like he was dancing on the tip of a knife, his heart threatening to beat out of his chest at any moment. He met the emperor's gaze several times.

It wasn't the end yet. He forced himself to look like he didn't know anything, unaware that he couldn't hide the cold sweat that trickled down his forehead.

The emperor sighed heavily. He'd been watching the sixth prince, waiting for him to confess.

This pause was the sixth prince's last chance. If he admitted it, then the emperor might show him some mercy.

But the sixth prince didn't react at all. The emperor finally lost his patience with his son.

"Tianxiao," he called out sternly.

Almost everyone turned to look at the sixth prince.

Mu Tianxiao closed his eyes, trying his best to not let his voice tremble along with his body. "Royal Father…"

"After Imperial Physician Pan left the tent, my guards followed him," the emperor said at last. "He released a pigeon, but the person he worked for was cunning and didn't leave behind any letters or messages, because they had agreed beforehand that the pigeon was the signal itself. When the servant met with Imperial Physician Pan, my guards followed him and found who was behind them both."

He looked at his son. "Tianxiao. While you were thinking about how to frame Prince Jing and the eighth prince, I was just a wall away. I heard your order to make everyone fail the test. This scheme was your idea, and I am the special witness. I didn't disclose it right away because I wanted to see how far you would go."

Mu Tianxiao felt the whole world darkening around him. Only the dragon-robed emperor remained.

H-how did this happen?

He desperately moved his lips, but he couldn’t hear if he was even saying anything.

Chapter 119:
Fish's Mercy

MU TIANXIAO WAS TAKEN away by the guards, and the emperor dismissed everyone else. His punishment would be decided after they returned to the palace.

The interrogation of Concubine Lu's "old acquaintance" was also finished. The emperor found out that he had been drunk and confused; in a daze, he'd run onto the hunting grounds and into Concubine Lu's tent. When he sobered up, he realized he'd made a huge mistake, but he didn't remember what had happened when he was drunk.

It sounded like a simple case of drunken havoc, but the hunting grounds were heavily guarded—it should have been all but impossible for a civilian to enter. And how could such an inebriated man have found Concubine Lu's tent when he wasn't familiar with the hunting grounds? Someone must have snuck the man in and led him to Concubine Lu.

Only someone of high status could do that.

The emperor had already captured the sixth prince, and he was set on investigating him.

After some hard work, they found out that the sixth prince's sedan chair had been in and out of the hunting grounds twice before the festival.

As the sixth prince was at the front of the sedan and his consort was pregnant, the guards hadn't been able to take a clear look at the inside of the sedan. When the emperor had people verify the consort's alibi, he found out

that Lady Liang hadn’t left the hunting grounds since her arrival. That meant one of those sedan trips must have been to bring in the drunken man.

The sixth prince had even used his pregnant wife as a shield. When he recalled Mu Tianxiao’s disregard for his consort’s health when he’d tried to use his unborn child as a way to win favor, the emperor wasn’t surprised.

But once they’d smuggled the man in, there must have been someone close to Concubine Lu who coordinated with them. The emperor looked into the people who came in and out of Concubine Lu’s tent. During that time period, the most frequent visitor was an older female servant.

The emperor ordered her arrested for interrogation, and an investigation revealed that she had once been a servant of Consort Li, the seventh prince’s mother. As Consort Li and Concubine Lu were close in age and both had sons, they were quite close. Concubine Lu liked the old servant’s embroidery, so Consort Li had given her to the concubine.

The moment the old servant was faced with the emperor’s furious expression, she kowtowed before him repeatedly, like she was trying to hammer a nail into the floor with her head. With tears and snot streaming down her face, she said that the sixth prince had blackmailed her and ordered her to let a man into the tent while Concubine Lu was resting.

As expected, it was the sixth prince again. After some thought, the emperor realized why the sixth prince had chosen this servant to let the man into the tent. Since she’d been a gift from Consort Li, if the emperor didn’t know the sixth prince was behind all this, a thorough investigation of this incident would have led him to the seventh prince’s mother!

The emperor had assumed the sixth prince was trying to kill two birds with one stone with this plan, but there were far more birds being targeted

here. He’d tried to bring down all the other princes with this plot!

No wonder the sixth prince had taken the enormous risk of continuing with his plan even after he learned that everyone tested was of royal blood. It was the final barrier in his way to the throne—a huge temptation. If Prince Jing and the eighth prince were guilty of polluting the royal bloodline, and the seventh prince was implicated in the incident with Concubine Lu, then the sixth prince would be the only candidate left.

Though the emperor had seen many underhanded plots throughout his life, Mu Tianxiao’s ruthlessness still had chills running down his back. He never would have imagined that the sixth prince could conceal himself so well.

Fortunately, the emperor had been made aware of the sixth prince’s ambition early on, thanks to Prince Jing and others.

Using secret marks and anonymizing the bottles as bait for the sixth prince had been a suggestion from Prince Jing’s consort. Prince Jing was the one who tailed Imperial Physician Pan, and he was also the one who’d asked the emperor to sit and listen in on the sixth prince’s conversation.

There was nothing more convincing than hearing it with one’s own ears.

If the emperor’s test for Prince Jing was still in progress, then at this moment, with the sixth prince’s true self revealed, he had already made his decision.

“Royal Father, are you all right?” Li Yu was worried about the emperor. Ever since the emperor had exposed the sixth prince in front of everyone else, he’d been in a bit of a daze.

What should we do if Grandpa is unhappy? The babies huddled together and whispered among themselves, working out a plan. Dabao immediately went up to Head Eunuch Luo, holding a bowl of tea.

Head Eunuch Luo hurried to stop him. “Shizi, you can’t! Be careful, it’s hot!”

Li Yu shook his head, smiling. The tea in front of the emperor was all at a drinkable temperature, so it wasn’t hot. It was better to have children start doing chores at a younger age.

And Dabao was happy to start. Dabao wanted Grandpa to cheer up. He walked unsteadily, but his grip on the tea was surprisingly stable.

The emperor smiled as he watched the itty-bitty human bring the tea to him.

Right when he was about to take the tea, Sibao leaped out from behind Dabao, yelling “Aaaahhh” to stop him.

The emperor doted on Dabao a lot, but that didn’t mean he didn’t dote on the other children as well. He wondered what Sibao was going to do.

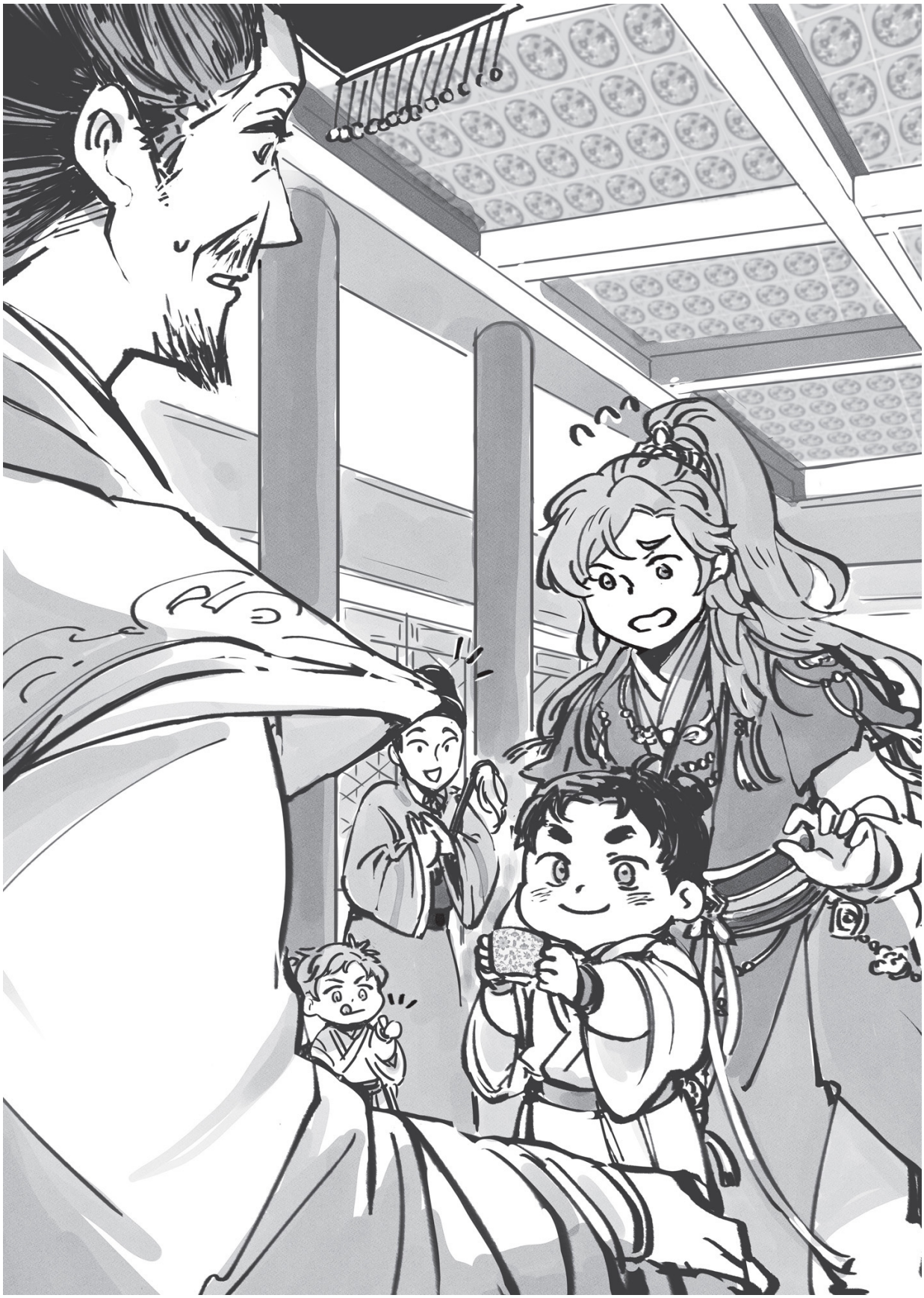
Sibao used his chubby little hand to lift the lid of the tea bowl and took several sips of the tea. He patted his stomach, now full of tea, and sternly nodded at Dabao.

Dabao continued his walk over and brought the already-drunk tea over to the emperor.

What…

For a moment, the emperor didn’t react. Li Yu was flustered. Those two idiots! How could they give the emperor leftover tea?! Li Yu was just

about to take back the teacup with Sibao’s saliva on it when Head Eunuch Luo kneeled and cried with joy, “How filial! Your Majesty, the young children are testing the tea for you.”



This was something Head Eunuch Luo did as well, so he recognized it immediately. He wouldn't drink from the cup itself, but the effect was the same.

No way. How did the children know about something like this?

It wasn't likely. Being the emperor was the most complicated job in the world, and Li Yu hadn't explained the significance of the role to the babies yet. Perhaps the children got used to seeing Head Eunuch Luo doing the same thing since they were often at Qianqing Palace, and they'd learned it by watching.

Perhaps, in the children's eyes, the emperor only ate leftovers?

But Head Eunuch Luo had understood at least one thing correctly. This was indeed a demonstration of the children's filial piety toward the emperor.

The emperor smiled and accepted the teacup. He took a sip, unbothered by the baby saliva. His sons had always disappointed him, but it seemed there was always new hope in the world.

After all this chaos, the emperor was no longer in the mood to hunt. He quickly announced that the hunting festival was over; he would return to the palace.

Prince Jing led Li Yu slowly toward the tent.

When they'd first arrived at the hunting grounds, they were both incredibly tense, knowing the sixth prince was going to make a move. Now that the sixth prince had fallen, even though the emperor hadn't said anything, they knew that this day had determined the future.

Li Yu had been aware of Prince Jing's protagonist halo for a while now. He thought about the hardships Prince Jing went through in the

original novel to ascend to the throne. This time around, it had been a lot easier. But so what? Prince Jing had suffered so much in the original story. He deserved a chance to relax.

Prince Jing was in charge of tracking the sixth prince today, but he still made sure to keep an eye on Li Yu and the children.

Though the sixth prince was always nearby, Li Yu wasn't afraid. He knew that Prince Jing was close too, silently protecting him.

"Tianchi, are you tired?" Li Yu asked quietly.

Prince Jing shook his head and turned around to hold Li Yu's hand. They had some extra time, so they weren't in a hurry to return. Instead, they watched the hazy moonlight for a while.

Everything would be different when they got back.

I'll always be good to you. Prince Jing's lips moved in a silent promise.

Li Yu batted his eyelashes to tell him, *I know.*

He was about to say something else when a shadow suddenly rushed over and jumped out right in front of him. Li Yu was startled. Prince Jing moved in front of him, about to draw his sword, when Li Yu saw who it was. "Tianchi, wait!" he said quickly.

The newcomer knelt down in a strange, twisted posture. "Your Highness Prince Jing, Consort, please! Help me!"

The sixth prince's consort Liang Suyun knelt before them, her hair disheveled.

"Lady Liang!" Behind her, a group of servants kept calling out to her, but she ignored them and stared at Li Yu and Prince Jing with tears in her

eyes.

Li Yu was shocked. What was going on? It was clearly inappropriate for Lady Liang to be kneeling before him and Prince Jing. Li Yu felt even more uncomfortable when he saw her slightly protruding abdomen.

“Don’t be like this,” he said, flustered. “Quick, get up.”

He and Lady Liang were technically in-laws, but Prince Jing and the sixth prince were enemies now. At most, Li Yu and Lady Liang had just greeted each other in passing, and since he was a man and she was a woman, he wasn’t close to her at all. It couldn’t remotely compare to the friendship between him and the princess of Jinjue.

“Please help me. I can only ask the two of you…” She remained on the ground. The servant next to her wanted to help her up, but she refused and continued to kneel, wiping her tears.

Li Yu exchanged a glance with Prince Jing. “What is it?” he asked.

The emperor had ordered the imperial guards to arrest the sixth prince, and Lady Liang must have heard the news. Li Yu and Prince Jing were absolutely the ones responsible for the sixth prince’s fate, so it was a bit awkward that Lady Liang was asking them for help.

And Li Yu wasn’t sure if this was another plot or not.

“I’m sorry, I know I’m being reckless. I want to see Tianxiao. Please, help me,” she begged.

The emperor had exposed Mu Tianxiao’s true personality in front of everyone, so the words “sixth prince” were like poison now—nobody wanted to touch them. Anyone who had any sort of connection to the sixth prince in the past wanted to wash themselves of him now.

When Lady Liang found out that the emperor had arrested the sixth prince, she fainted several times. When she woke up, she wanted to see the sixth prince no matter what—he was her husband, after all. Though he didn't treat her very well anymore, she couldn't just abandon him. Besides, she was pregnant with their child.

But who could she ask?

Consort Zhang didn't have any ideas, and she was hiding from her daughter-in-law too. The Marquis of Dingbei had been quite satisfied with the sixth prince before, but now that all this had happened, his daughter's marriage would implicate him. There was nothing he'd like more right now than for her to divorce the sixth prince, so there was no way he'd be willing to help her.

The emperor didn't give Lady Liang any chances either. Every time she asked to speak with him, Head Eunuch Luo would come out and just tell her to take good care during her pregnancy.

Lady Liang had looked around and begged everyone she could, but she was left with no other choice but to shamelessly plead with Prince Jing and his consort. She'd heard that one of the reasons for the sixth prince's plot was to try to frame Prince Jing, but she didn't know of anyone else who had the power to help her.

"You want us to help you see the sixth prince?" Li Yu repeated.

Lady Liang nodded quickly. "Consort, I just want to see him from a distance… I would be immensely grateful!" She kept kowtowing at them, and when he saw the way she avoided her belly every time, Li Yu couldn't bear it.

The sixth prince was their enemy, but Li Yu pitied his consort. Wasn't that unbelievable?

Be careful, Prince Jing's gaze warned him.

"I don't have any bad intentions, really. I just need your help." The sixth prince's consort was almost in despair.

"Tianchi, I…" Li Yu hesitated, glancing at Prince Jing.

He was also a parent. He noticed that Lady Liang was always protecting her stomach, so he was sure she wasn't pretending. The sixth prince was despicable, but Lady Liang herself hadn't harmed them. Li Yu instinctively wanted to help her—and it was something he could accomplish with little effort. It wasn't like he'd have to do much.

They couldn't let the sixth prince's consort see him without the emperor's permission, though. Li Yu wasn't planning on doing something different; he didn't think he'd survive attempting any other option. All he had to do was beg for the emperor's mercy and ask him to let the two of them meet.

"Just this one time," Li Yu asked Prince Jing quietly. "Is that okay?"

Xiaoyu was pitying her… Prince Jing understood. He squeezed Li Yu's hand. It was a bit risky, but the sixth prince's consort was in their control. Prince Jing looked at him and smiled. *You make the decisions.*

Li Yu felt sweetness blossom in his heart for a second. At that moment, the system, which had been silent since the main mission "Share the Country" was announced, suddenly sent a notification!

‹User, you have met the conditions for activating the side mission "Heart of Compassion."›

Helping Lady Liang was a side quest?

Li Yu was baffled. The fish-scamming system had said that “Sharing the Country” was the last main mission, but there hadn’t been any updates after the sixth prince was arrested. Li Yu assumed he would have to wait until Prince Jing ascended the throne, which was fine by him, since he had all the time in the world. The system had previously told him that he could choose to complete a side mission whenever he wanted to… Li Yu couldn’t even remember the last time he’d completed one.

‹The reward for “Heart of Compassion” is an ancient medicine prescription. Would you like to begin this mission?›

Ancient medicine prescription? Li Yu was a little surprised. What kind of reward was that, and what was it for?

The fish-scamming system existed to scam him. It wouldn’t explain anything it didn’t absolutely have to. It was just like with the fish plush; the system wouldn’t tell him how to use it. Li Yu would have to figure it out on his own.

An ancient medicine prescription sounded pretty good, though. It was better than nothing. If he didn’t need it, then he’d just hold on to it. It might become useful one day.

Besides, he wasn’t doing it for the reward. He truly did want to help the abandoned Lady Liang.

Chapter 120:
Fishy Rescuing the Emperor

HAVING DECIDED he'd help Lady Liang, Li Yu didn't want her to have to make another trip, so he pulled her along directly with Prince Jing to ask to see the emperor.

The emperor was surprised that Li Yu wanted to help her, but he remembered the way Li Yu educated his children—Li Yu was a kindhearted person, he concluded.

"That's what he wants. What about you?" the emperor asked Prince Jing, wanting to know his opinion.

Prince Jing nodded, showing that he supported Li Yu.

"In that case, I'll allow it." The emperor was happy to give Prince Jing and his spouse what they wanted. He thought of reminding them both about something, but after a moment of thought, he decided to keep it to himself.

Li Yu quickly told Lady Liang the news. She was afraid that the guards would stop her, so she asked Li Yu to go with her. He hesitated for a moment, but he thought he should see things to the end, so with Prince Jing's agreement, they all accompanied Lady Liang to the tent where the sixth prince was being held.

They couldn't go any further. Li Yu had to be careful and, besides, it wasn't like he was the one who wanted to see the sixth prince.

Lady Liang entered the tent, thanking him the entire way.

When she saw Mu Tianxiao, covered in dirt with his hands and feet bound, she couldn’t stop the tears flowing from her red, swollen eyes.

“Suyun, why are you here?” Mu Tianxiao was elated to see his wife. The guards responsible for him didn’t let him see anyone, so how had she managed to get in? Did this mean the emperor was relenting a little? “Did Royal Father tell you to come?” he asked anxiously. “Has he forgiven me?”

“It was me. I begged Prince Jing and his consort for help, so Royal Father showed me some mercy,” Lady Liang explained timidly, afraid the sixth prince would be upset.

“Prince Jing again?” Mu Tianxiao’s expression changed as soon as he heard Prince Jing’s name, and he pushed his wife’s hand away impatiently. “Why did you ask him of all people?! Don’t you know he’s the one who did this to me?!”

Having reflected on his failure, the sixth prince believed he’d fallen into one of Prince Jing’s traps. The emperor must’ve started targeting him because he believed Prince Jing’s lies. The sixth prince blamed everything on Prince Jing.

Lady Liang wiped her tears, unsure how to answer. Should she tell him that nobody was willing to help them now?

Since Mu Tianxiao was already locked up, there was no need for him to keep hiding his true nature. He started cursing out Prince Jing’s family, even the young children—it was hard to listen to. After he was done, he seemed to finally remember something. He turned to look at Lady Liang, his tone turning gentle.

“Suyun, don’t cry.” He wiped the tears from her face. “Since you’re here, can you help me beg Royal Father?” he said expectantly. “He’ll

definitely let me out for the sake of our unborn child. I'll be good to you in the future, I promise."

Lady Liang listened to his repeated assurances, but her heart stung when she saw the fake smile on his face, devoid of warmth. How could she have been tricked by this man before? This husband of hers looked gentle on the surface, but he only ever thought of himself.

Li Yu and Prince Jing were standing outside the tent, and they could hear the sixth prince cursing them. Prince Jing was used to people talking about him like that and he didn't mind it, but when the sixth prince started cursing out Xiaoyu and the children, his expression darkened and his grip on his sword tightened.

Li Yu grabbed his arm. "Tianchi, don't!"

When Li Yu first heard the sixth prince cursing out his sons and his husband, he also wanted to march in there and beat him up, but there was no way he could let Prince Jing actually walk in there and teach the sixth prince a lesson! Mu Tianxiao was the emperor's prisoner right now, so it wasn't appropriate to beat him up in front of everyone. Prince Jing's current status meant that he could make the sixth prince's life a little harder, but there was no need for him to handle anything personally. It would make the emperor suspicious.

Li Yu whispered a few ways to humble the sixth prince into Prince Jing's ear, and when he was finished, Prince Jing stared at him, speechless. This was the same man who'd been softhearted enough to help Lady Liang just now…

Li Yu mischievously stuck out his tongue. "Those two things are different. Lady Liang is quite pitiful, but the sixth prince has done so many

evil things. I wouldn’t forgive him just like that.”

Xiaoyu was always reasonable. Prince Jing patted his head and smiled, convinced.

The sixth prince started throwing out ugly curses again. The two of them looked at each other and pretended not to hear anything.

Lady Liang hadn’t just come to see how the sixth prince was doing—she’d been hoping he would realize the error of his ways and live a peaceful life from now on.

The sixth prince wanted the throne, and Lady Liang, who was his spouse, had more or less figured it out. In the past, she’d thought that a wife shouldn’t get in the way of her husband’s ambitions—and besides, what woman didn’t fantasize about having a higher status? And so she never stopped him, but she didn’t participate either. She regretted being so delusional in the past. How much better would things be now if she’d convinced him to stop back then?

She didn’t dare hope for anything else, only for her husband and child to be safe.

His eyes widened in disbelief. It was one thing if she didn’t want to help him, but why was she criticizing him now? Her status as a prince’s consort was all thanks to him. What good would it do her if the emperor kept him locked up?

The sixth prince was furious. But he had another plan. He gave her a thin smile. “You’re right… Suyun, come here. I have another secret to tell you.”

Lady Liang was utterly unguarded against him, so she came closer—only for Mu Tianxiao to coldly wrap his chains around her neck.

“Tianxiao, what are you doing?!” she screamed, horrified.

“Don’t move.” Mu Tianxiao kept a tight grip around her neck and shouted toward the outside, “Someone come! I want to see the emperor! Or else I’ll kill her!”

I’ll kill her!

Those three words shattered the relationship between the sixth prince and Lady Liang. She looked at him tearfully, feeling as if her heart was slowly being squeezed to death.

Prince Jing and Li Yu were just outside, and they rushed in with the guards as soon as they heard the commotion.

Li Yu didn’t know what to say when he saw the sixth prince’s hold on his consort.

With his bloodshot eyes and fierce expression, shouting that he wanted to see the emperor, the sixth prince looked like a demon. The guards were already running to report the incident.

Watching Lady Liang struggle, Li Yu wanted to help, but he was afraid that the sixth prince would actually hurt her.

“Mu Tianxiao, have you no conscience?!” He spoke up on her behalf instead. “She’s your wife! She’s pregnant with your child!” How come he was always running into situations that turned out worse than the original book?

The sixth prince scoffed a couple of times, and a tear seemed to flash in the corner of his eye. “I might not even be able to save myself,” he said indifferently. “Why would I need a wife or child?”

Soon the emperor arrived, and he was furious at the sixth prince's threats.

"Mu Tianxiao, are you insane?" he bellowed. "Let go of Lady Liang!"

"Royal Father! You're here! Please listen to me one last time! I just realized that I didn't do anything wrong! I was framed by Prince Jing! Royal Father, you don't know what a scheming person he is! He planned everything!"

Mu Tianxiao tried his hardest to defend himself while Prince Jing stood there and listened, unmoved. The emperor shook his head in disappointment.

"That's enough, Tianxiao. Weren't you the one who tried to frame Concubine Lu? Didn't you bribe Imperial Physician Pan? Didn't you send someone to sneak into Prince Jing's manor to steal Dabao's blood? Did Prince Jing force you to do all this?"

Mu Tianxiao was stunned. "Royal Father…"

How did the emperor even know about him sending someone to extract Dabao's blood?

It was like he'd suddenly been enlightened. Mu Tianxiao finally figured it out… So, Prince Jing had already guessed what he was going to do from that very moment.

How funny. When he thought he had an advantage over the other party, they were already waiting for him to fall into a trap.

"Royal Father, Prince Jing really was plotting against me!" Mu Tianxiao was furious. he wanted to expose Prince Jing.

“That’s enough,” the emperor interrupted him icily. “Why should I believe someone who doesn’t even care for his wife and child over Prince Jing? Tianxiao, there’s a phrase you’ve said before to escape punishment. I return it to you now. All of this is just ‘one side of the story.’”

“Royal Father…” Mu Tianxiao was stunned. He started laughing, as if the emperor had just told a joke. After he was done laughing, he gritted his teeth, staring fiercely at Prince Jing and the emperor with the gaze of a trapped beast. “What nonsense! You just favor Prince Jing. You’ve never believed me!”

An imperial guard moved behind the sixth prince and struck his neck.

At the same time, the sixth prince yelled hoarsely, “Do it now!”

No! Li Yu realized that one of the sixth prince’s people must be in the tent with them. Someone had taken advantage of the chaos and tried to stab the emperor. This was the sixth prince’s final plan: to attack the person he hated the most at a critical moment.

Mu Tianxiao hated his birth and hated Prince Jing who took everything from him, but he hated his father the most. His father, the one who never liked him no matter how hard he tried to please him, the one who never took him seriously.

He knew the emperor wouldn’t kill him, but he couldn’t stand the thought of going back to the invisible person he used to be.

At that moment, Li Yu was the closest to the emperor, so he pushed him aside. But it was too late to dodge, and he was left vulnerable to the dagger.

Xiaoyu—!

Millions of shouts burst in Prince Jing’s chest, and he ran over frantically, his sword drawn.

Time seemed to stand still.

Li Yu closed his eyes in fear.

The sounds of wind and human chaos echoed in his ears.

He waited. There was no pain.

Li Yu opened his eyes. There was a palace servant holding a dagger in front of him. The tip of the dagger was only a finger’s length away from him.

With a clang, the dagger fell to the ground.

Prince Jing’s sword had pierced through the servant’s chest from behind.

Prince Jing saved him!

“Tianchi, I’m fine!” Li Yu yelled, his voice rough with emotion.

Prince Jing pulled his sword out coldly and kicked the servant to the side. Li Yu rushed toward him, and Prince Jing embraced him.

The imperial guards had pinned the sixth prince to the ground, so he couldn’t move, while Lady Liang had been rescued and was watching in horror. The sixth prince was devastated. In the end, he still wasn’t able to even touch the emperor’s dragon robes.

He suddenly noticed a beauty dressed in palace robes among the tumultuous crowd. That person was as beautiful as an immortal in a painting and was watching quietly with apathetic, delicate eyes.

Mu Tianxiao stared avidly at this person for a while before he remembered who it was.

This was the emperor's new concubine, Noble Lady Chu, a chess piece that he had personally delivered onto the emperor's bed—his!

Yu-er, help me… Mu Tianxiao begged silently as he lay on the ground.

He still had hope. Chu Yanyu was his last hope.

Chu Yanyu seemed to have seen him too. He smiled at him from a distance, as gently as he once had in the past. Then, he turned around and left without any hesitation, taking Mu Tianxiao's hope with him.

The emperor was unharmed after that false alarm, but he no longer intended to show any mercy to the sixth prince, who had dared try to assassinate him.

"Just kill me," Mu Tianxiao muttered as he was tied up and taken away by the guards. Lady Liang knelt on the ground, sobbing.

"Tianchi!" Li Yu held on to Prince Jing tightly. He had been so terrified just now.

At the time, he was thinking about the grandpa emperor who was kind and affectionate to his children, but the emperor was also Prince Jing's father. The sixth prince's assassination attempt had been so sudden that the only thought in Li Yu's mind had been saving the emperor.

Prince Jing didn't blame Li Yu for being reckless. Instead, he hugged him and patted his head.

Perceptively, Li Yu noticed that Prince Jing's complexion seemed a bit off.

“What’s wrong? Are you feeling unwell?” Li Yu asked, concerned.

Something really did seem to be bothering Prince Jing. He gently let go of Li Yu and pressed his hand to his chest.

Li Yu had never seen him wheeze so severely. Prince Jing suddenly coughed several times, and a streak of black blood seeped out between his fingers.

“Tianchi, what’s wrong?!”

Li Yu was terror stricken.

Chapter 121:
This Fish Loves Him So Much

THE EMPEROR was panicked too—nothing could be allowed to happen to Prince Jing! He quickly ordered the guards to take Prince Jing back to his tent and summoned all the imperial physicians to examine him.

Prince Jing had thrown up blood; Li Yu was even more frantic than the emperor. From what he knew, only heavy injury or a serious illness could make someone throw up blood. Prince Jing didn't have any injuries, so was he sick?

They'd been together the whole day and he didn't even notice! What kind of incompetent consort was he?!

Li Yu felt remorseful and worried. When the guards came to take Prince Jing away, Li Yu jumped up and insisted on going with them. Even though he'd just vomited blood, Prince Jing was still clearheaded, and he held Li Yu's hand as he lay in the sedan, hoping it would calm him down.

No matter what Prince Jing gestured, Li Yu agreed to it. But how could he possibly keep it together on the inside? If Prince Jing fell sick, his whole world would collapse. Then what was he to do?

Some people, when overwhelmed with too much stress, would respond by settling into an extraordinary calm. That was happening to Li Yu right now.

He still had the children. If Prince Jing was sick, Li Yu still had to support his family—he couldn't just wallow in misery. He had to think of the children and come up with ways to help Prince Jing.

When they got back to their tent, Li Yu dried his eyes and went to check on the children, who were being taken care of by Wang Xi. They were happy to see their fish dad, but Li Yu unfortunately had to let them know that Daddy Prince Jing was sick, so they had to behave and were going to be left in Wang Xi's care again. Wang Xi was beside himself with concern when he learned that Prince Jing was ill, but the consort was right. The young masters needed to be taken care of, and he couldn't let the prince worry while he was sick. Wang Xi knelt down and begged Li Yu to take good care of Prince Jing. Li Yu agreed. He went to stay beside him, watching Prince Jing unblinkingly.

The imperial physicians came in waves, and each time, they advised Li Yu to go rest, but Li Yu just sat there and ignored them unless he was asking about Prince Jing's condition.

"Tianchi, how do you feel?" Li Yu cupped Prince Jing's cheek worriedly.

Prince Jing smiled at him. It wasn't a big deal. After he'd spat up that blood, Prince Jing's complexion improved and his breathing steadied.

Li Yu felt that Prince Jing was telling the truth, but the imperial physicians examined him again and again, and for some reason they wouldn't tell him what was wrong.

The longer the examinations went on, the more anxious Li Yu felt. If the imperial physicians weren't saying anything, did that mean the illness was so severe that even the imperial physicians weren't sure if they could cure it?

After some discussion among the physicians, an older imperial physician approached them. "Your Highness Prince Jing, I have some more

questions for you. Please tell me the truth.”

Li Yu looked at Prince Jing, curious. If the imperial physician asked a difficult question, Prince Jing would have to write. Was he well enough to do that right now?

Prince Jing was feeling better, so he nodded in response. Li Yu immediately went to the table to fetch a brush and paper.

“Your Highness, before you threw up, did you feel any discomfort?” asked the imperial physician.

Prince Jing wrote, *My qi and blood surged, my chest was in pain, and my throat burned.*

“Have you ever had a similar incident, Your Highness?” the imperial physician asked carefully.

Prince Jing thought back carefully, then nodded and wrote, *Yes, but I didn’t vomit blood.*

“Then, Your Highness, do you remember the first time it happened?”

Prince Jing hesitated, then wrote, *Over a year ago.*

Over a year ago? Li Yu’s eyes reddened. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Prince Jing quickly wrote, *You were sick with a cold, and I was unwell because I was anxious. It got better quickly, so I didn’t think much of it.*

…A cold?

Li Yu was very healthy, and he rarely ever caught little colds or the like. He paused for a moment before he remembered that this had happened early on when Prince Jing proclaimed his love, back when Li Yu hadn’t realized his own feelings yet and was fighting with Prince Jing.

Back then, all he cared about was how unhappy he was, so he didn't notice Prince Jing's illness or discomfort.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know…" Li Yu was so despondent that he almost started crying.

Prince Jing quickly shook his head. *It had nothing to do with you. I didn't pay attention to it.*

While Prince Jing tried to comfort Li Yu, the older imperial physician discussed Prince Jing's answer with the other physicians present, then took his pulse again.

As for the emperor—he shouldn't have come over personally to check on Prince Jing, but how long the imperial physicians were taking to come to a conclusion was making him worried, so he came to Prince Jing's tent himself.

"What's wrong with Prince Jing?" he asked.

After everything that had happened, the emperor had already decided on Prince Jing as his successor. He didn't want anything to happen to him.

Since the emperor came to ask personally, the older imperial physician looked around and asked the emperor to step aside to speak privately.

The emperor complied. The imperial physician knelt and said, "Your Majesty, after much examination, it seems that Prince Jing has been poisoned over a long period of time. As he just experienced a serious and stressful incident, this caused His Highness's qi and blood to surge, making him vomit out some of the poisonous blood in his body, which led to its discovery."

Poisoned???

Prince Jing was shocked, as were Li Yu and the emperor. How could he have been poisoned? Was it the sixth prince's doing?

Li Yu felt like his heart was in his throat. "Imperial Physician, what poison is it?" he asked hurriedly, ignoring the emperor. "Is it curable? What do you mean by 'over a long period of time'?"

Considering what Prince Jing said earlier, had he been poisoned for over a year?

He…vomited black blood because he was poisoned?

The emperor didn't mind Li Yu's rudeness. "Answer quickly," he said. "I want to know as well."

The imperial physician took a moment to organize his thoughts. "Your Majesty, please allow me to answer the last question first," he said respectfully. "We've concluded that the poison in His Highness's body has been there for decades, and it was only this year that the toxicity subsided a little, leading to his qi and blood surging and the poison's discovery."

"Decades?!" The emperor was shocked. Prince Jing was only in his twenties—how could he have been poisoned for decades?

Judging by the look on Prince Jing's face, it was obvious that he was surprised as well. He didn't even know it himself!

"Do you mean that Prince Jing has been poisoned ever since he was a baby?"

The emperor recalled that Prince Jing was very weak when he was born. He had been examined by the imperial physicians several times by the time he was just a couple of months old. It improved when he grew up, but there had been no signs of poisoning. What's more, Prince Jing's pulse was

taken regularly—if he'd really been poisoned for decades, why didn't they find out earlier?

"Your Majesty, the poison isn't very strong," the physician explained, "and Prince Jing never showed signs of discomfort. It's very hard to detect just by his pulse."

"Then does the poison pose any danger to his life?" asked the emperor.

The older imperial physician hesitated and shook his head. "We only know that His Highness has been poisoned, but I have to take his pulse and reference the medical books before I can be certain of the particulars. However, since the poison has been in His Highness's body for a long time, he probably isn't in any immediate danger."

The emperor was dismayed. He'd just decided to make Prince Jing his heir—were the heavens playing a huge joke on him?

Prince Jing was born mute, which was already devastating enough, but somehow, the di prince had been poisoned right under his nose!

Since it'd been for so long, it couldn't have been the sixth prince who did it. He was a few years younger than Prince Jing. Then who could it possibly be? Who else wanted to harm Prince Jing?

The emperor felt both anger and guilt for not taking good care of his son. He also felt like he had let down the late Empress Xiaohui.

"We must rid Prince Jing of the poison no matter what!" the emperor ordered.

The older imperial physician complied.

The emperor turned around. Remembering the four children, he worriedly asked, “Will the poison be passed on to his children?”

The imperial physician wasn’t sure, so the emperor ordered Wang Xi to bring the children over.

The elderly imperial physician took each of their pulses and discussed it with the other imperial physicians before coming to his conclusion: “The shizi and the three other young masters are not poisoned.”

Finally some good news, the emperor thought—a silver lining at last.

The emperor summoned Wang Xi to question him. Since Wang Xi had always been with Prince Jing, there must have been abnormalities when Prince Jing was first poisoned. Wang Xi would definitely know about something like that.

Wang Xi thought long and hard, but in the end he swore on his life that Prince Jing had never shown any signs of being poisoned.

The emperor was already a mess from the sudden announcement that Prince Jing had been poisoned, and decades ago, at that. Though he found Wang Xi’s answer suspicious, he had no other clues for now.

Li Yu dazedly listened to the emperor’s questions, and he finally understood what was going on—Prince Jing had been poisoned when he was young?

But how come he didn’t know? This was hardly insignificant, so why didn’t the original novel mention it at all?

He remembered that Prince Jing had stayed healthy until the end of the book. Did that mean that if Prince Jing hadn’t vomited blood this time, they never would have found out that he was poisoned, and it would have stayed hidden? Then what was the point of this poison?

Poison usually caused symptoms. Prince Jing…really didn't seem like he was poisoned, and both in the original book and in this world, Prince Jing remained healthy his whole life, except…

Li Yu was in the middle of bringing ginseng soup to Prince Jing when his hands suddenly shook, and the silver spoon clattered as it fell to the ground. He bent over to pick it up, but his hand was trembling so much he almost couldn't hold it.

Just now, he'd had a very terrifying thought.

It was the emperor and imperial physician's guess that Prince Jing had been poisoned when he was young. But it was strange—Wang Xi, who was in charge of looking after Prince Jing since he was a child, had never noticed anything out of the ordinary. Li Yu believed Wang Xi, since there was no reason for him to lie. Could it be that the poisoning had taken place even earlier? Before Wang Xi started working for Prince Jing?

It was impossible for the poison to show no symptoms if it was buried so deeply in his body. Could it be that existing symptoms had been overlooked?

That symptom would naturally be…Prince Jing's biggest weakness, his muteness.

Li Yu wasn't an imperial physician, but he knew from reading palace novels that there were poisons that could cause deafness and muteness.

Was it possible that Prince Jing wasn't born mute, but that it was a result of the poison?

Li Yu suddenly remembered a small incident from some time ago.

Prince Jing didn’t plan on having more children because he didn’t want to pass on his muteness, but Li Yu really wanted to have a daughter. So, he’d asked around about the emperor’s and empress’s ancestors to calculate what the odds were, but in the end, he found out that none of them had been mute. That is, out of hundreds of people in over a dozen generations, man or woman, Prince Jing was the only one born mute.

Genetically speaking, that was nearly impossible.

But life was complicated. Li Yu had transmigrated at a very young age—he was hardly an expert on genetics. Anyway, it could have been simply a mistake on the part of the original novel’s author.

Now that he thought about it, many parts of the book that had seemed like plot holes or lazy writing to him when he’d read it had gradually been explained. For example, Prince Jing’s name, Tianchi, was different from the other princes’ names, but that was because he was originally named Tianjing and had changed his name.

Then was there possibly a logical reason for his super-unlikely-but-somehow-still-existing muteness? Maybe Prince Jing was poisoned when he was very young, and it was misunderstood to be innate; then, because of this, others never realized that he was poisoned?

Of course, it was only a guess. If it was true, then that would be frightening. It would be best if Li Yu could find some evidence to either confirm or deny it.

When Prince Jing was very young…before Wang Xi came… poisoned…

A scene floated into Li Yu’s mind—the newborn Prince Jing laying in his swaddle as he stared at his wet nurse, who was swallowing a packet of

medicine with tears in her eyes.

Holy shit! Li Yu was shocked at himself. Why did he suddenly think of that?

This was the secret of Prince Jing's that he'd never really understood. The time period was right, and it was before Wang Xi's time, but the wet nurse was the one taking the medicine, not…

No, that wasn't right!

Li Yu recalled one of his conversations with the princess of Jinjue, who had mentioned that a wet nurse could pass medicine to a child through milk to cure the child of an illness.

Then if the wet nurse took poison, would the child…?

Li Yu felt like he'd been grasping wildly at straws and suddenly grabbed the right one!

Xiaoyu? Seeing him lost in thought, Prince Jing squeezed his fingers.

Li Yu came back to his senses and resisted the urge to tell Prince Jing.

He only had guesses and conjecture, so he couldn't impulsively tell Prince Jing. If the poisoning had nothing to do with his muteness, wouldn't he just be giving him false hope?

The most important thing now was to help the imperial physician determine what the poison was.

No matter what, I'll save you, he decided, gazing at Prince Jing.

Sob, this fish loves him so much! I don't want to be a widow!

Chapter 122:
Fishy Solution

IT WOULD TAKE the elderly imperial physician a couple of days to determine exactly what poison Prince Jing was suffering from. Li Yu recalled that he'd just finished a side mission by helping Lady Liang, and the reward was an ancient medicinal prescription. The mission was completed when they'd confronted the sixth prince, so he should be able to collect the reward quickly.

Li Yu didn't understand why the fish-scamming system would reward him with an ancient medicinal prescription, but now that he thought about it…did it have to do with the poison in Prince Jing's body?

He hoped it was the antidote, but he couldn't enter the system in front of the emperor and the imperial physician to retrieve it—if he did, he'd pass out, and that might cause a panic.

Plus, because of Lady Liang, he and Prince Jing had been up all night, so the time limit for his transformation was quickly approaching.

This had clearly also occurred to Prince Jing, since he kept staring at the silver hourglass, reminding Li Yu with his gaze.

Li Yu smiled and lightly pinched Prince Jing's palm. He cleverly excused himself to the emperor, saying he needed to change, and the emperor waved him away since he was busy talking to the imperial physician. Li Yu quietly slipped into the next tent.

The tent was empty, and the countdown for his transformation time hadn't appeared yet. Li Yu entered the system first and collected the reward

for “Heart of Compassion.”

With the prescription in hand, Li Yu took a look at it—but as expected, he didn’t understand it because he didn’t know anything about medicine.

Li Yu put it away. “What’s the prescription for?” he asked the system. But just as he expected, the fish-scamming system didn’t reply.

There were imperial physicians outside, though, so Li Yu didn’t need to insist on an answer from the system. All he had to do was ask them to take a look at it and tell him what it was used for.

He had another goal for entering the system.

Li Yu asked, probing, *‹System, is there a secret behind Prince Jing’s muteness?›*

The system was aloof as always and didn’t respond, but Li Yu had figured out a pattern from the system’s nonanswers. The system would only respond when the answer was definite.

The original novel had spent a lot of time describing how Prince Jing couldn’t speak since he was a child, that the emperor had given up on him early on because of it, and how the other princes had laughed and made fun of him for it. If his muteness was innate and there wasn’t any more to it, then it should be an obvious, definitive setting of the story. Why couldn’t the system answer the question?

Since the system didn’t answer, it meant that there was another answer.

Li Yu suddenly became spirited. *‹Is Prince Jing’s muteness innate?›* he asked, bluntly.

‹…›

If the system was silent one more time, Li Yu was going to jump for joy!

‹*System,*› Li Yu asked, ‹*Can Prince Jing's muteness be cured?*›

‹…›

Since it didn't say it couldn't, that must mean it could!

Haha, I know the answer even if you won't say! Li Yu happily blew a kiss at the system and left giddily.

When he left the system, he heard the countdown. Li Yu was experienced with transforming, and since the transformation duration was now a whole day, he could almost immediately use his skill again when he turned back into a fish. He waited calmly.

Time was up. In a flash, he'd turned into a silver koi with golden scales, and he even flicked his tail in midair. The next moment, he used his skill and once again became the delicate and dignified Prince Consort Yu.

Since he'd said he needed to change when he left, he now switched his robes and returned to Prince Jing's tent.

"Royal Father, I remembered that there was an ancient medicinal prescription in a book I'd seen before. I'd like to ask the imperial physician to take a look at it and see if it will be of any help with Prince Jing's poison."

Li Yu took out the prescription. The most important thing now was to cure the poison. Even if it was no use, he had to give it a try.

The emperor knew that Li Yu was beside himself with worry. The elderly imperial physician hadn't figured out what poison it was yet, and the

consort was already trying to offer up a prescription. However, the emperor was quite moved by his concern and gestured at the imperial physician to take a look.

The imperial physician smiled. “This is a prescription for strengthening and nourishing the body, but it won’t cure the poison.”

“Really?” Li Yu was disappointed.

“Yes.” The elderly imperial physician felt bad seeing Li Yu’s dismay, but he continued, “This prescription is used for strengthening the body, but if the poison is to be cured, we have to find out what kind of poison it is first.”

Li Yu nodded. The imperial physician made sense: they had to know what they were dealing with before anything else. “Then how long until it can be determined?”

The elderly imperial physician stroked his beard, a little chagrined. Researching medical books took some luck, so he couldn’t give an exact date. If he was lucky, it could take days or months, but if he was unlucky, it could take years.

The imperial doctor had told them the truth. The emperor wasn’t really satisfied, but he knew that this was just how things were sometimes. He planned on having the imperial physicians handle the diagnosis and treatment while he sent out an imperial notice calling for famous physicians from across the country. Perhaps a physician outside of the palace would know.

When he heard the imperial physician’s answer, Li Yu clenched his jaw. He had pretty much confirmed through the system that Prince Jing’s muteness had to do with the poison. He suspected that Pu Liu had

administered it back then, so he had to confirm that for everyone else somehow, no matter what.

Summoning physicians was one thing, but Li Yu could take a shortcut through the system!

The system had shown him the secret with Pu Liu in it. If she was the one who poisoned Prince Jing, then there might still be clues left in her former quarters!

After the elderly imperial physician left the tent, Li Yu knelt and asked the emperor if he could take a look at the sealed room in Changchun Palace.

As Pu Liu had made her mistake before Empress Xiaohui passed away from illness, the emperor was the one who'd ordered the room sealed. She'd left an impression on him, so he remembered her immediately, but he was surprised to hear Li Yu mention her name. "How do you know of Pu Liu?" he asked.

Li Yu was ready for the question and recounted the incident where the children had destroyed the cloth tiger. He said that he felt Pu Liu's mistake was suspicious, but he had no evidence. "I believe that the imperial physicians' diagnosis and treatment is one solution," he added, "but I might be able to help if I can find the poison, or some other clue."

The emperor's imagination didn't run as wild as Li Yu's did, so he didn't consider any connection to Prince Jing's muteness. But back then, when he was handling the matter with Pu Liu, Empress Xiaohui had already been unwell, so he'd been both anxious and furious. There were a lot of things that he didn't think through as carefully as he could have, and now

that Li Yu mentioned it, he did think there was something suspicious about Pu Liu.

As a wet nurse who had taken care of two other princes, it was very unusual for someone like her to make such a basic mistake.

Li Yu was eager to help Prince Jing and wanted to confirm things with his own eyes, which made it hard for the emperor to refuse.

“You can go ahead,” he said after a moment of thought. “Since there are some suspicions around Pu Liu, I will ask Head Eunuch Luo to check where she is now. I exiled her from the palace, as I recall it, so we can probably still find her.”

Li Yu thanked him profusely. He knew that Pu Liu had gone back to her hometown, since Head Eunuch Luo had looked into her current whereabouts. Now they could use this information!

But there was no need to tell the emperor about this.

After asking Li Yu to take good care of Prince Jing, the emperor left. Prince Jing knew that Li Yu had investigated Pu Liu before, and now that he brought it up in front of the emperor, it definitely wasn’t something that he’d come up with on the spot.

Do you think she’s the one who poisoned me? Prince Jing asked.

Li Yu couldn’t tell Prince Jing what he’d seen in the system, so he wiped his face and said earnestly, “Tianchi, I can’t tell you yet, but I’ll do my best to investigate and cure the poison.”

Prince Jing nodded. What the imperial physician said earlier had touched something deep inside of him as well.

He was only in his twenties, accompanied by the love of his life and his children. He felt fulfilled and had never thought about what would happen after his death. But now, he'd suddenly discovered that he had been poisoned for decades. Even though the imperial physician promised to do his best to treat him, and Xiaoyu said he would look into it for him, Prince Jing had no choice but to plan for the worst.

He was once afraid that Xiaoyu would leave him after his tribulations were over. He never thought that he might leave Xiaoyu first instead…

Even if he couldn't ascend to the throne, he was still satisfied with how far he'd gotten. He didn't have any regrets. But it was a pity that he wouldn't be able to grow old together with Xiaoyu.

Xiaoyu was a carp spirit; if he died, the fish would simply move on with his life. No matter how much he despised that idea, there was nothing he could do. His short human life couldn't keep Xiaoyu forever, but he was satisfied that the carp spirit chose to spend his life with him.

It was one thing to understand something with reason, but emotions were harder to accept.

Prince Jing's knuckles turned white from his grip, and his painful yet passionate eyes were locked onto Li Yu, wanting to hold the memory of what he looked like forever.

Wang Xi would take good care of the children after he was gone. Prince Jing believed in Wang Xi, and he also believed in his children, who were growing day by day.

The only thing he couldn't let go of was this fish. He wanted to protect Xiaoyu for as long as possible, and he hoped that the fish would remember him forever.

Prince Jing quelled the pain in his heart and jingled his jade bell to summon his confidants. Then he patted Li Yu's hand and wrote on Li Yu's palm: *They are all yours in the future, for you to use.*

At first, Li Yu thought Prince Jing was assigning him some helpers, but when guards who were usually hidden appeared too, Li Yu was shocked. What future was Prince Jing talking about?

Was he taking care of things in preparation for his death?

Li Yu felt like a knife had been stabbed into his chest, and the pain was unbearable. He squeezed out a smile that was even uglier than his crying face and did his best to distort Prince Jing's words.

"That's good, actually. With the men you're lending me, I'll be able to find clues in just a couple of days… Don't forget that I'm a carp spirit! There's nothing I can't do. If I haven't given up, then you can't either!" He turned around, furiously wiping away the small tear at the corner of his eye as he boasted.

He wasn't completely sure whether he could really cure the poison, but he had one thing to rely on. The system had said before that Prince Jing had the protagonist's halo, which meant he would definitely ascend to the throne: even if he was poisoned, he wouldn't be in any life-threatening danger.

It was much too soon for both of them to be arranging post-death matters!

Prince Jing paused, realizing that this was Li Yu's declaration of love. He stopped thinking about it, held Li Yu's hand tightly, and nodded.

Now that Prince Jing's poisoning had been uncovered, the emperor rushed them all back to the palace. Li Yu immediately hurried to

Changchun Palace as planned, and even brought an accessory along—Prince Jing himself.

There was no way around it; when his tyrant husband heard that Li Yu was going to the palace, he insisted on going with him no matter what. Though his men were already at Li Yu's disposal, the poisoned Prince Jing was being very overbearing and completely unreasonable, forcing himself into the already-small group of people to make the trip.

Li Yu couldn't talk him out of it, but fortunately, the elderly imperial physician said that since the poison had been with Prince Jing for such a long time, it probably wouldn't affect him if he continued as usual. Li Yu was still a little worried, though. He occasionally glanced at Prince Jing, who never left his side.

Prince Jing gave Li Yu a glance. *No need to worry. You can start.*

Li Yu stopped hesitating and went straight to Pu Liu's room. He ordered the servants to remove the seal, and just like that, the room that had been sealed for decades finally saw the light of day.

This room was said to have been preserved as it was, but since it hadn't been cleaned for such a long time, it was full of cobwebs. Li Yu felt a little apprehensive. The palace servants asked if they should clean it, but Li Yu refused the offer. If there were clues here, it would be better to leave things as they were.

Li Yu took a dry rag to remove the cobwebs in his way, but Prince Jing stopped him, pushed him out the door, took the rag, and did it himself.

Stuck at the door, Li Yu wondered which of them exactly was the one who was poisoned.

Prince Jing had always been like this, though. He didn’t want Li Yu doing work.

After the cobwebs had been mostly cleared, Li Yu was allowed to enter the room again and take a look around.

The bed was no longer in a recognizable shape, the sewing basket was still on the table, and the chair was overturned on the floor.

“Tianchi, do you remember any of this?” Li Yu tried to question Prince Jing, wanting to jog his memory. But Prince Jing shook his head.

Li Yu had expected this answer. He put the chair back and sat where Pu Liu once had. After letting Prince Jing know he was about to “meditate,” he entered the system.

If he remembered correctly, there were several secrets of Prince Jing’s that he hadn’t viewed yet. By his request, the system had allowed him to rewatch the secret to this room before, and now he could trade one of the secrets for another rewatch!

He refused to believe there were no clues in this room!

Li Yu didn’t exchange all of the secrets at once, instead starting carefully with just one.

He once again entered the world of the secret, watching Pu Liu wait for someone, scuffle with the servant, and ingest the medicine. He didn’t let a single detail escape him. He desperately wanted to be able to pause the memory, thoroughly examine the scene, and then have it continue again.

This wasn’t his first time reviewing this secret. He thought he’d seen everything there was to see the last time he viewed it, but he still discovered something new.

Li Yu didn’t have time to examine the new information as he discovered it, so he committed each part to memory and then exited the system to compare it to the real room.

Right at the end, he’d seen Pu Liu swallow the medicinal powder. The piece of paper that was used to wrap the powder had slowly drifted to the floor under the table.

The paper…

Li Yu’s heart jumped, and he stood up.

Chapter 123:
Fishy Cures Poison

WAS THE PIECE OF PAPER that once contained the drug still in the room?

Li Yu looked around at once, eager to find it, but all he found were dust bunnies.

Li Yu realized that the memory hadn't necessarily taken place right before Pu Liu left. Though the emperor had sealed the room, it didn't mean that everything was still in the same place as it was in the memory. The paper that fell to the floor was most likely cleaned up before then.

Li Yu gritted his teeth. He was a koi—he wished that he could have a koi's good luck for this.

He calmed himself, sat down again, and compared the details he saw in the memory to those in reality.

There weren't any useful clues so far.

He spotted the sewing basket and started taking everything out, not hoping for much. Under a few scrap pieces of cloth, he found a cloth tiger.

In the memory, Pu Liu had a half-sewn tiger, and the one here was mostly put together. It should be the same one. Li Yu assumed that the cloth tiger Pu Liu was working on had been torn by the children, but it seemed that she'd made more than one. It made sense—children's toys broke easily, so they'd have several. Dabao and his brothers were the same.

Li Yu held the cloth tiger in his hand, examining it. Then he rubbed it hard.

As he rubbed it, he felt something scrape against his palm. The cloth tiger the children played with didn't have anything like that.

Li Yu met Prince Jing's eyes. He took out a pair of scissors and carefully cut the cloth tiger open.

The lining came first, which had "Pu Liu" embroidered on it, just like the one Li Yu had seen before. Then, after the cloth tiger was opened, the corner of a piece of paper poked out. Li Yu paused, then took out the paper. It was folded, and since it had been in the cloth tiger this whole time, it was practically untouched by dust.

When Li Yu carefully pried the paper open, he found a small bit of powder still left in it, roughly the size of a pinkie nail.

Was this…

Li Yu recalled the paper that the medicine had been wrapped in. The color was exactly the same.

"Tianchi!" Li Yu shouted, excited.

Prince Jing nodded and handed Li Yu a porcelain bottle. Li Yu folded the paper back up and put it inside. He wasn't sure what the powder was yet, but he hoped that it had to do with the poison. He needed to get it to the elderly imperial physician as soon as possible.

Li Yu exited the room. There was a servant kneeling outside who eagerly asked if he needed any help. Li Yu had finally found some clues, so there was no way he'd let someone else help. He held onto the porcelain bottle himself and dragged Prince Jing to the Imperial Academy of Medicine.

Imperial physicians could usually tell the composition of a medicine just from its dregs. If it was a powder, they could probably figure out what

it was, right?

Li Yu personally handed the powder to the elderly physician who was treating Prince Jing.

The imperial physician still didn’t believe that this was the poison, but with Prince Jing and his consort both there he had to thoroughly check it anyway, so he carefully sniffed the powder.

“Strange…” The imperial physician couldn’t believe it. After he received Li Yu and Prince Jing’s permission, he tasted a small amount—and immediately spat it out.

He wiped his lips. “Your Highness, Consort, please give me a bit of time…” Without even finishing his sentence, he excitedly ran off into the depths of the Academy of Medicine.

Were they finally getting somewhere?

Li Yu wasn’t going to go anywhere, so he and Prince Jing sat in the academy, waiting.

The longer it took the elderly imperial physician to return, the more anxious Li Yu grew. Prince Jing had steadied his emotions already, so he patted his head to tell him not to worry. From his robes, he took out a small golden fish with a swollen belly, strung together with four little fish, and gave it to Li Yu to fiddle with.

When Prince Jing wanted to make him happy, he would always give Li Yu different golden fish. They were full of memories.

Li Yu fiddled with it for a bit, feeling troubled. What if they couldn’t find anything even after all this?

Then he’d continue! Even if he had to dig three feet into the ground!

After the imperial physician left, there was no news at all until dusk, when the physician rushed back out with a thick medical book in his arms, missing both his shoe and sock on one foot.

“Imperial physician!” Li Yu shouted at once.

The imperial physician looked up to see Prince Jing and Li Yu, and asked, surprised, “Your Highness, Consort, why are you still here?”

He’d completely forgotten that they were still waiting.

Li Yu didn’t mind. He looked at the medical book in the imperial physician’s arms hopefully. “Did you find something?”

The elderly imperial physician smiled and nodded. “It’s all thanks to you two. I finally found something.”

Li Yu’s eyes shone, and he had the imperial physician sit down and explain in detail.

The imperial physician discovered that the powder Li Yu had given him was extremely similar to the prescription for nourishing the body, but with an extra ingredient.

In traditional Chinese medicine, a slight change could result in a huge difference. With just a single extra ingredient, the intended effect might be completely different. So the imperial physician had rushed out to find out what the extra ingredient was.

After extensive verification, he concluded that it was xuewuzi.

Li Yu and Prince Jing knew nothing about medicine.

“Xuewu is a type of tree that grows at the top of snowy mountains,” the imperial physician explained. “It blooms and bears fruit every sixty years, and the fruit is called xuewuzi. It is amazing for the body but hard to

come by—not many have appeared in this dynasty, and there aren't even any in the academy at the moment. I was lucky enough to see it when I was younger, and that's how I learned of its medicinal properties."

Li Yu was surprised. "It's good for the body?"

So, it had nothing to do with the poison?

The elderly imperial physician nodded. "Yes, it's good for you. But there's a rule when using xuewuzi—it cannot be taken with female ginseng. If those two are taken together, it becomes poisonous. I tasted both xuewuzi and angelica in the powder, which means…this powder is indeed poisonous."

The imperial physician had confirmed most of Li Yu's guesses. Li Yu curled his hands into fists anxiously.

"Then is this the poison that His Highness is afflicted with?"

Li Yu told the imperial physician how he'd found the powder, as well as how Pu Liu, the wet nurse, took the powder, and about his own suspicion that the poison had been transmitted to the newborn Prince Jing through her milk.

The imperial physician's eyes brightened. "That is definitely possible. I'll need to look into it further…but thanks to your help, Consort, I'm no longer running around like a headless chicken." He stroked his beard happily. "I should be able to confirm it within half a month."

Li Yu finally saw a ray of hope, and he told the imperial physician that he would be waiting for good news. And although it hadn't been confirmed yet, he asked the imperial physician to keep it a secret.

Prince Jing had been poisoned for such a long time, and as of right now Li Yu had determined that the culprit was Pu Liu, but why would a

small wet nurse want to harm the empress's son? And the servant who argued with Pu Liu… From what Li Yu saw in the memory, it had seemed like she had taken the poison unwillingly. The servant's behavior proved that the poisoning was definitely not just Pu Liu's idea.

Li Yu had looked for that servant as well, but he'd seemed quite ordinary, and Wang Xi said that servants like this were all over the palace. In comparison, Pu Liu was a wet nurse, so it felt more likely he'd make a breakthrough on the case by looking into her. That was why Li Yu focused all his efforts there.

Now that he thought about it, though, Pu Liu had been kicked out of the palace, but what about that servant? Could it be that the forces that poisoned Prince Jing were still in the palace, unnoticed by the emperor? That was almost certain, but it had been over twenty years ago. The other party must be in a significant position of power by now; it could be someone that they didn't even expect.

For the sake of caution, it would be best not to reveal their knowledge of any of this, in case the culprit wanted to harm Prince Jing again.

After he left the imperial physicians' hall, Li Yu headed straight for Qianqing Palace.

The emperor was very happy that they'd found clues about Prince Jing's poison. Though the elderly imperial physician hadn't confirmed it yet, the emperor felt that the paper being found within the cloth tiger meant Pu Liu was definitely involved. Li Yu asked the emperor to keep it a secret too, and the emperor felt his caution was justified.

"It's all thanks to you," the emperor said warmly.

The emperor had given Li Yu the title of consort and treated him pleasantly mainly because of Prince Jing and the children, but they'd interacted more during the hunting festival. The emperor had seen firsthand the affection between Prince Jing and Li Yu, as well as the effort Li Yu put into looking for clues. Now, though he didn't say so out loud, he trusted Li Yu completely. He thought Prince Jing was a great judge of character.

The emperor agreed that the findings should be kept a secret. He was thinking a little further than Li Yu, actually.

If Pu Liu had poisoned the newborn Prince Jing…then what had happened to the other two princes she'd raised, the eldest prince and the fourth prince? Some things were terrifying to consider. The eldest prince and the fourth prince's deaths were unbearably painful to the emperor, but he had to properly investigate them no matter what.

If it really hadn't been an accident…

The emperor stared at the brush next to his hand for a long, long time. No matter who the other party was, he would break them into a million pieces. He owed it to the late Empress Xiaohui.

Meanwhile, after the elderly imperial physician gave him that half a month deadline, Li Yu went to probe the system by peppering it with questions.

Did Prince Jing's poison have something to do with xuewuzi?

Could Prince Jing's muteness be cured?

Would he be able to speak again if his muteness was cured?

…

The fish who had always been scammed by the system finally rose up and scammed the system back. The fish-scamming system responded to every question with silence—it made the carp spirit feel very confident.

“It’s only half a month! There’ll be results after that!” Li Yu reminded Prince Jing happily.

Seeing Li Yu running around like this on his behalf to look for the poison, Prince Jing stopped worrying about whether he might leave him alone. Xiaoyu had saved him again, Prince Jing thought as he gazed at him warmly. He should keep the carp spirit by his side and repay him with everything that he had.

“Tianchi, if you could speak one day, what would you want to say?”

His muteness was definitely related to the poison, but it hadn’t been confirmed yet, so Li Yu couldn’t tell Prince Jing outright. But it would be fine if he looked forward to it, right?

Prince Jing had actually thought about this before. He smiled as he wrote, *I would want to say, “Royal Father,” and call out to the children.*

Most of all…

His brush stopped, and he looked at Li Yu.

Most of all, I want to call your name, he wrote.

Li Yu sniffed, emotional, and imagined it. If he could really hear Prince Jing say his name, he wouldn’t even be afraid to turn into fish bones and fish ash.

Half a month passed under Li Yu’s excited watch.

During this time, Head Eunuch Luo, who was looking for Pu Liu on the emperor’s orders, sent a message that Pu Liu had passed away on the

road back to her hometown. Her death further muddied the circumstances around Prince Jing's poisoning.

Although that branch of their investigation had come to a halt, the elderly imperial physician gave them a satisfying answer to the other. He'd been looking into medical records for half a month, and even tried the medicine on himself. He concluded that the poison Prince Jing was afflicted with was xuewuzi mixed with female ginseng, as Li Yu expected, but Li Yu found it hard to come to terms with the physician's plan to cure it.

The poisonous effects of xuewuzi were hard to cure. The elderly imperial physician believed that the only way was to fight poison with poison, but it was extremely dangerous. The battle between the two poisons would make Prince Jing very weak, and if he wasn't careful, he might fall victim to the second poison as well.

The reason the elderly imperial physician dared mention such a plan was that there was an antidote for the second poison in the imperial physicians' hall. Compared to xuewuzi, this other poison was much easier to deal with.

Li Yu hesitated, but Prince Jing had already nodded in agreement. Xiaoyu had tried his hardest to pave a pathway for him; how could he not walk down it?

After Prince Jing took the second poison, he threw up increasing quantities of black blood. The elderly imperial physician said the poisons were fighting each other. Prince Jing tossed and turned in pain until his clothes were soaked with sweat. It wasn't until he stopped throwing up the black blood that the imperial physician let him take the antidote.

Afterward, he fell into a deep sleep.

Li Yu stayed next to the bed, distraught for him. The emperor came to visit several times and comforted the children, but perhaps because the other poison was too strong, Prince Jing still didn't wake up after he'd been given the antidote.

The emperor was almost beside himself with worry, and the elderly imperial physician couldn't figure out what was going on. Prince Jing's pulse was weak, but his heart was still beating.

Li Yu was afraid that Prince Jing would drift into a coma, so he talked to Prince Jing every day and told him stories about the children.

One day, Li Yu was telling him about how the emperor had made the decision to send Dabao and the others to the imperial study room to be tutored by reputable teachers, but that the teacher didn't know what to do when faced with such cute, lively children.

Dabao was extremely focused in class; as a one-year-old, he could sit completely upright. After he started classes, he'd worked out his previous mistake with his "Oa." Erbao and Sanbao had a great relationship, so great that they would take turns listening to the lecture and playing—the teacher wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. And Sibao slept through the entire class. Who did he take after?

Li Yu was speaking rather emotionally and had turned around to pour himself some water when a hoarse voice sounded nearby.

"Xiao…yu…"

He almost thought he was hearing things.

The voice was so hoarse that it was almost grating, and the pronunciation wasn't quite right, but there was something familiar about the profound emotion in it.

Li Yu turned around to meet Prince Jing’s cold, pond-like eyes, and dropped the teacup he was holding.

Chapter 124:
Fishy Teacher

PRINCE JING WOULD often call out Li Yu's name in his mind, but now that he'd actually made a sound, it seemed as if he couldn't quite believe it. He stayed frozen in place.

Li Yu rushed over. "Tianchi, you're awake!" he cried out with joy. "You…can speak, right?!"

Even though he had already guessed as much a few days ago from the system's silent answers, a guess was still just a guess. The thought that Prince Jing would definitely recover kept him going the entire time, helping him stay hopeful even after Prince Jing was given the antidote and still didn't wake.

And he really had heard Prince Jing's voice just now, because—

Li Yu pinched his thigh, hard. It really hurt.

Prince Jing himself didn't know why this had happened. For the past couple of days, he hadn't been able to wake up, but he could hear. He heard everything Xiaoyu said to him.

Every time Xiaoyu spoke to him, he would respond in his heart, but Xiaoyu had no way of knowing. In order to stop Xiaoyu from worrying, he tried his best to wake up, and when he finally opened his eyes, before he realized it, he'd already uttered Xiaoyu's name.

The sudden, strange sound was hoarse and broken, like the tip of a sword dragged through gravel. It was unexpected to Prince Jing too—this was him?

He could make sounds now…?

His throat was itchy and painful. The whole time he was asleep, it had felt like it was on fire.

Prince Jing barely believed it. He froze and hesitantly said, “Xiao…”

He suddenly stopped. The sound definitely came from his chest.

It was him.

Prince Jing was shocked.

Li Yu was a little stunned, then belatedly hugged him. His eyes were full of tears, but he happily shouted, “Tianchi, Tianchi!”

Prince Jing hugged him back firmly, wanting to say something else, but he was too weak. Once he realized that he could speak, he found that it wasn’t easy to put what he was feeling into words. There were lots of words that he had heard before and could read, but he suddenly didn’t know how to say them.

He could only hug Xiaoyu, his chin placed affectionately on Xiaoyu’s shoulder, and respond with a heavy, “Mhm.”

Li Yu was overjoyed that Prince Jing could speak. He told Wang Xi first, and Wang Xi’s reaction was even more dramatic than Li Yu’s: he fell to his knees, crawled over, and stared at Prince Jing.

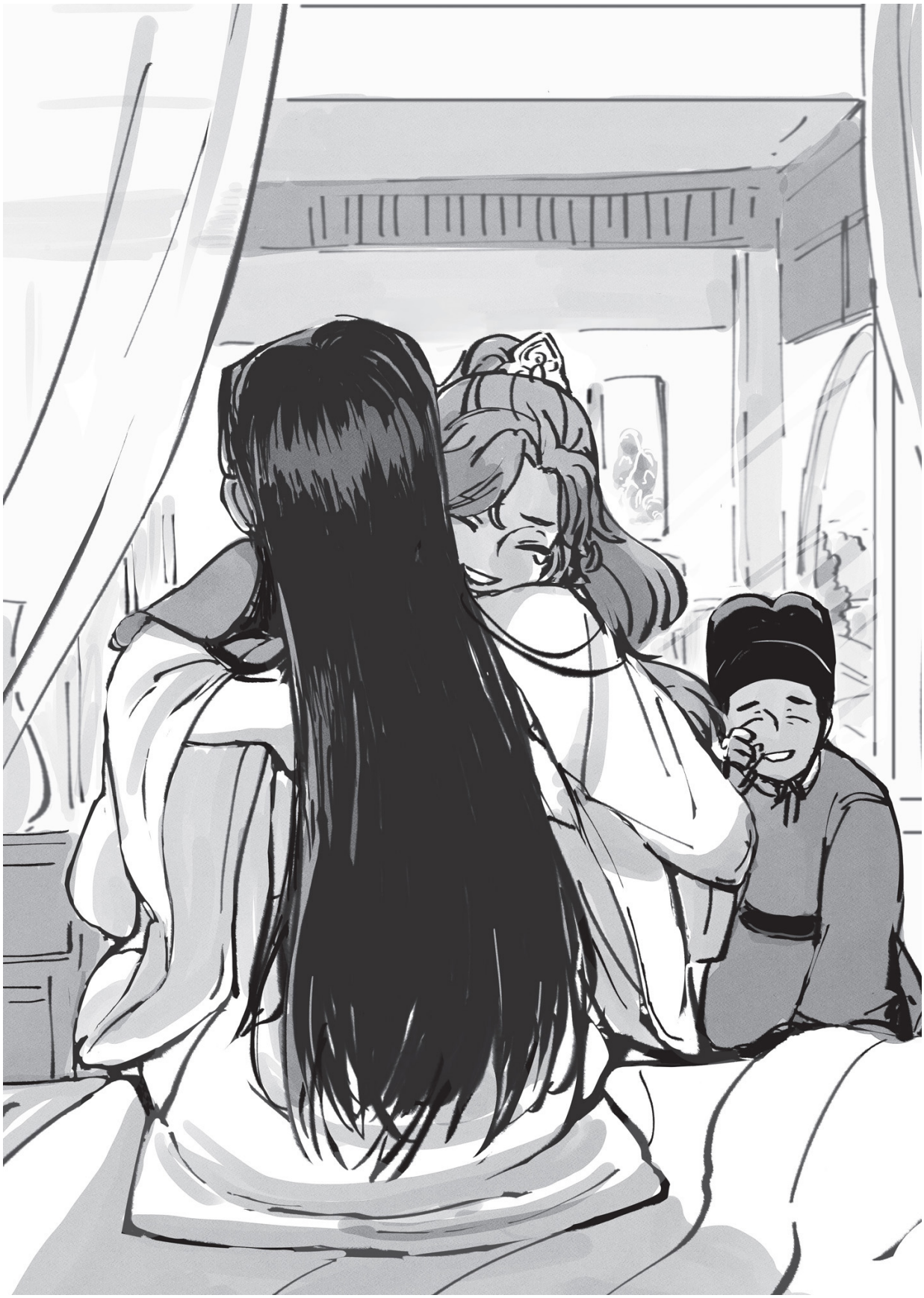
“Your Highness?” he asked, trembling.

Prince Jing shut his eyes. “Wang…”

Wang Xi. He knew who he was, of course, but he wasn’t used to speaking yet. Just this one word was enough to make Wang Xi burst into tears, though.

“Your Highness, you’re favored by the heavens. I have no regrets in this life anymore!” Wang Xi exclaimed, smiling and crying.

The elderly imperial physician was hurriedly summoned to Prince Jing’s manor. After he heard Prince Jing stutter a bit, he was shocked. He took Prince Jing’s pulse and announced it as an unexpected surprise.



“The poison has been cured now, but I didn’t expect that the muteness would also—”

Everyone had always said Prince Jing’s muteness was innate. The possibility had never occurred to the physician. But his muteness had disappeared with the poison, which meant that it was a result of the poison, not congenital.

This imperial physician had been in the palace for decades now. He knew Prince Jing had been silent since birth. But if it was the result of poison, then he must have been poisoned shortly after he was born.

There were only a few people who could have done it.

But the elderly imperial physician was only in charge of curing Prince Jing of the poison. With the poison now gone, as well as his muteness, the imperial physician barely even had time to celebrate, so he didn’t give the implications too much thought.

Li Yu had thought of something. He threw the imperial physician a look. “Imperial physician, since His Highness is cured from the poison and can speak now, does that mean he won’t pass on the muteness or the poison to his descendants?”

The imperial physician didn’t quite understand what he was implying, but he answered just the same. “Since His Highness’s muteness was caused by the poison, and the poison is now cured, the children will not inherit it. Please rest assured, Your Highness, Consort.”

Li Yu’s smile nearly split his face in half, and he batted his eyelashes at Prince Jing. Prince Jing’s heart trembled. He understood what Xiaoyu wanted—since his muteness was cured, there was no need for contraception in the future.

Prince Jing silently nodded: *All right, you have my word.*

Just like Xiaoyu, he wanted a daughter too.

With the prince and his consort exchanging loving glances, the imperial physician felt like the air had gotten warmer somehow. He cleared his throat. “Though the poison is now gone, His Highness is still weak and should continue taking medicine for a while,” he said. “The strengthening prescription the consort had is quite good for that. I will add some throat soothing medicine as well, and I hope Your Highness recovers quickly…”

The elderly imperial physician was so happy that he couldn’t stop himself rambling on, eager to explain the medical reasoning behind everything. Li Yu and Prince Jing just stared into each other’s eyes, gripping each other’s hands tightly. Their hearts were overwhelmed with joy; they almost couldn’t hear anything else.

Wang Xi brought the imperial physician to the palace to report to the emperor. When the emperor heard the news he rushed over to Prince Jing’s manor, where Prince Jing, supported by Li Yu, knelt and tried to call him “Royal Father.”

The emperor’s feelings were extremely complicated. He felt happiness at regaining what he’d lost, but he was furious that he had been deceived by a traitor.

It wasn’t appropriate for the emperor to say too much, so he told Prince Jing to stand and patted him on the shoulder. All of his emotions were let out in a long sigh as he said, “Tianchi, get well soon. There are still a lot of matters for you to attend to.”

He stared at Prince Jing for a long time with tears in his eyes. Prince Jing had only just regained his ability to speak and so he could only say a

few words, but the emperor was very satisfied. But they couldn’t tell the outside world that Prince Jing could speak again—if they found out that his “muteness” had been fake, then what was real?

Pu Liu was reportedly dead, but there was no evidence yet. And the midwife who delivered Prince Jing and the imperial physician who diagnosed him back then still needed to be investigated too. It was true that the emperor hadn’t heard Prince Jing’s cries when he was born, so there had to be something more to it.

The belated realization that Prince Jing wasn’t born mute was like a sharp rock, shattering the decade-long peace within the harem.

Luo Ruisheng and the imperial guards were currently investigating the cause of Pu Liu’s death. Until the truth was revealed, the emperor needed Prince Jing to pretend to still be mute so as not to alert their enemies.

Prince Jing and Li Yu could roughly guess what the emperor’s plans were, and they agreed.

The children had been attending classes at the palace recently. When the emperor received the news that Prince Jing had been cured of poison, he’d brought the children with him to visit.

Li Yu had only told them that Daddy Prince Jing was feeling unwell and couldn’t see them for a bit. The children didn’t quite understand, but they were sad for several days because they couldn’t see their daddy. The emperor had ordered them to study in the imperial study room partly because the children were smart but also because he wanted to distract them.

Now that they heard Daddy Prince Jing was getting better (already healed), the children were overjoyed. They ran into the room one by one and grabbed onto Prince Jing's trousers. Prince Jing smiled and hugged each of them, bringing them all up to his lap. Li Yu was worried that he was too weak for this, but Prince Jing shook his head at him.

He'd missed the children while he was unconscious.

The children hadn't been hugged in a while, and all of their eyes were rimmed red.

"Sibao missed Dad." Sibao lay on his dad's chest, softly expressing how much he missed Daddy Prince Jing.

Prince Jing patted the top of his soft head. He couldn't pronounce the "si" from "Sibao," so he could only say, "…Bao, Dad, missed."

Dabao, Erbao, and Sanbao perked up their ears. Daddy Prince Jing suddenly spoke!

The fish children were used to Prince Jing's muteness. They didn't know what a disability was, and back when they were very young, Li Yu had kindly explained to them that Daddy Prince Jing couldn't speak because he was sick.

Fish Dad didn't want the children to think of Prince Jing as different. He did his best to make the children believe that he and Prince Jing were the same; unexpectedly, the fib became the truth. Prince Jing was "sick," so naturally, there'd come a time when he was cured!

"Daddy's all better now!" Dabao suddenly realized.

Before the children could jump up, Li Yu hurriedly told them that Daddy Prince Jing wasn't completely healed yet, so they couldn't tell

anyone else. This was a secret between the children and their fathers. Li Yu stuck out a pinkie, asking them to keep it a secret.

Dabao, Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao loved keeping secrets for Fish Daddy. They fought to be the first one to complete the pinkie promise. Sibao even especially linked pinkies with Prince Jing.

“Daddy, Sibao, same.” Sibao had made a new discovery. He smiled as he pointed at Prince Jing, then himself.

Among the children, Sibao wasn’t great at speaking. Prince Jing also wasn’t great at speaking, since he was recovering. They were on the same level.

Little Sibao was now a fish who’d gone to school. He knew what a teacher was. Hurriedly, he offered, “Sibao teach Daddy!”

Prince Jing smiled and was about to agree when Li Yu picked Sibao up.

“Um… Let go of Daddy Prince Jing and let me do it!” Li Yu pursed his lips at Prince Jing, then smiled widely at Sibao.

Sibao was suddenly frightened by his fish daddy’s smile. He felt a bit confused. He hadn’t even done anything yet, and Fish Dad had already eliminated him?

Li Yu really meant it when he said he would teach Prince Jing. It would be easy, since he’d taught the children how to speak already.

Teacher Yu was quick to prepare his lesson. He held a peach blossom pastry and smiled. “Tianchi, you can only eat it if you get it right.”

Prince Jing smiled back slightly and nodded. Was Li Yu trying to start his education? But it wasn’t bad to have a reward.

There was no way Li Yu could start by teaching Prince Jing to say “dad.” Prince Jing was a little out of practice; he could read, but it came out a little different when he tried to say it. It was because he didn’t have any real experience with reading out loud. Li Yu decided to start by teaching him pinyin, since that was how they’d taught it back where he came from.

Yu-laoshi quickly filled the paper up with writing. “Tianchi, do you know bo po mo fo de te ne le?”

Prince Jing didn’t know it, so he smiled and asked for help. “Xiao… yu.”

His hoarse voice was still quite unpleasant, and the elderly imperial physician said it would be like that for a while. But every time he said Li Yu’s name, it sounded magical, stirring the fish’s heartstrings and making his scalp go numb.

Teacher Yu almost got distracted, and he tapped sharply on the blackboard, blushing. “No interrupting! Read it with me!”

Prince Jing the student filled up with a bunch of knowledge on consonants and vowels.

He was the first person in ancient times to learn about pinyin, but he didn’t find it too difficult. Since he listened carefully to Li Yu and picked things up easily, he soon realized that Xiaoyu seemed to be teaching him some form of basics. After he got the hang of the vowels and consonants, Xiaoyu wrote out the most commonly used pinyin and taught him how to string it together.

Prince Jing stumbled a bit trying to combine it all and would occasionally make mistakes, but Li Yu told him to take his time. Prince Jing

slowly learned how to first say a word, then a phrase, and then people's names.

Perhaps it was fate: Xiaoyu's name was the first one he called, and the only one that he never got wrong.

To help Prince Jing improve faster, Li Yu gave him the task of reading out loud.

That usually happened in the morning, as Li Yu believed that the morning was when one had the most energy and was in the best state for learning—perfect for reading practice.

Morning reading was a daily occurrence. Teacher Yu had student Prince Jing start with the simple "man at birth is fundamentally good in nature,"[3] and work his way up to storybooks from there. He would often give personal demonstrations and surprise checks.

"Tianchi, how is this pronounced?" Teacher Yu flipped to a certain page of a certain storybook, pointed to a certain line, and pretended to casually listen for his answer.

Student Prince Jing glanced at him and read emotionlessly, "Husband." His cold face and voice tickled Li Yu's heart.

"What about this one?"

"Partner."

He pronounced both words flawlessly. Li Yu was over the moon, thinking that he was sneakily taking advantage of his student. In reality, Prince Jing knew exactly how many times he'd read those words, and he was absolutely going to make Li Yu pay for it in a different way in the future.

Li Yu treated his prince student and his fish students differently; he was stricter with Prince Jing. The children would get a peach blossom pastry even if they just blew a bubble, but he would only give Prince Jing a peach blossom pastry if he was in a good mood, even if Prince Jing's mouth was dry from reading all day.

But Prince Jing didn't complain. He smiled and ate the peach blossom pastry from Li Yu's hand. One of Yu-laoshi's fingers would always inevitably end up in Prince Jing's mouth.

Teacher Yu couldn't bear it anymore, and there was no need for him to bear it anymore either.

"It's okay to take a break from learning how to speak once in a while," Teacher Yu said shyly. "Why don't we first suck—have a daughter?"

Chapter 125:
Heart of the Matter

LI YU HAD HIS GUESSES as to who had orchestrated the poisoning of baby Prince Jing, but he was just Prince Jing's consort. If he tried to look into harem incidents from several decades ago, he'd face a lot of roadblocks, so it was best to just let the emperor investigate. For now, there was nothing he and Prince Jing could do but trust the emperor.

Other than that, there was a horrifying fact to consider. In this world, Prince Jing was cured, but the Prince Jing in the original book must have been mute his whole life. No wonder the children he had, either in this world or the book, could all speak. It wasn't because he was lucky, it was because his muteness wasn't genetic. In this world the truth was fortunately revealed, but in the original novel, there was no carp spirit to help him figure out the truth.

Li Yu felt they had gotten lucky, but he was also scared. Although the secret to Prince Jing's muteness had been dangling in front of him for a while, he'd almost missed it.

Prince Jing had ended up vomiting blood out of panic as a direct result of Li Yu choosing to complete the side mission "Heart of Compassion," and the reward for the mission was a prescription that had to do with Prince Jing's muteness.

Adding xuewuzi to the prescription created the poison Prince Jing was suffering from, while adding extra healing ingredients helped Prince Jing recover now.

One never knew what surprises the fish-scamming system had in store.

Sometimes, if one did a good deed, one was rewarded.

With the side mission finished, Li Yu had been able to help Lady Liang—which had also resulted in him and Prince Jing overcoming one of their most difficult obstacles so far. The end of the road was in sight.

After the emperor took everyone back to the palace, he'd ordered the guards to throw the sixth prince in prison, on the charges of holding Lady Liang hostage and suspected attempted regicide. No one dared speak up on the sixth prince's behalf.

Since the sixth prince had dared to try to harm him, the emperor was well within his rights to dispose of him, but he couldn't actually bring himself to kill him. Keeping him alive was a sign of extreme benevolence.

This time, Concubine Zhang knew that the sixth prince had committed an unforgivable crime, so in the spirit of self-preservation, she shut herself in Yongfu Palace and didn't come out unless absolutely necessary. The emperor reprimanded her severely but, as she wasn't directly involved with the sixth prince's actions, he allowed her to keep her concubine title. In front of the emperor, she was usually just a tremulous quail, and it was precisely this quail-like personality that saved her in the end.

As for Lady Liang, she no longer felt anything for the sixth prince. The shock of everything that had happened caused her to miscarry the same night she was taken hostage, and without another word, she packed up her belongings and left to live with her parents.

The framed Concubine Lu was released after a bout of investigation, and reunited with the eighth prince, while the seventh prince and his mother, Consort Li, learned from the emperor that they had been part of the sixth prince's plot as well. The seventh prince learned that although he might know someone, he couldn't know their heart. The two young princes matured quite a bit thanks to the events of the hunting festival.

And since the emperor had sent Prince Jing's four sons to the imperial study room, the seventh and eighth princes were no longer the youngest ones there—now they were uncles! The two little princes puffed out their chests proudly.

The emperor was laying the way for Prince Jing, and he explicitly told the young princes that Prince Jing was the one who had cleared them of any suspicion. As a result, the two princes made sure to take special care of their nephews. With the imperial study peaceful and harmonious, the emperor was very satisfied. If the seventh prince and eighth prince had a good relationship with the four children, that meant they were on good terms with Prince Jing, so there was no need to worry about what might happen in the future.

Head Eunuch Luo, meanwhile, was ordered to investigate Pu Liu's cause of death. In the end it was revealed that she had died from poison. The emperor ordered the elderly imperial physician to assist, and he found that there was residual poison in her body, the exact same that Prince Jing had suffered from: xuewuzi mixed with female ginseng.

That made it clear that Pu Liu had taken the concoction herself and passed the poison to the newborn Prince Jing through her milk. The poison must have taken hold of her after she left the palace—it was lucky that she didn't directly give Prince Jing the poison, or he might not have lived for

more than a few months. Since the xuewuzi was passed through her milk, its toxicity was weakened, so instead of death its only effect was that Prince Jing couldn't speak. The poison that stayed in Prince Jing's body caused him no other harm.

That was where the poisoner's shrewdness lay. If Prince Jing had been poisoned directly and died, the emperor would have launched a strict investigation. But if he was poisoned indirectly and simply appeared to have been born mute, the emperor would at most have the imperial physicians take a look at him; he'd pray to the heavens, but he wouldn't punish anyone else.

But this way, even if the emperor and Empress Xiaohui's di son remained in this world, it was almost the same as having no son.

The emperor was very sure that he and Pu Liu held no grudges against each other, so he didn't understand why she would do this. Pu Liu must have been acting on someone else's orders. Luo Ruisheng continued to track down her family members.

He found that her family had fallen victim to a plague not long after she passed away, and they had perished as well. And of the two midwives that delivered Empress Xiaohui's child back then—one of them fell off a cliff, her body never recovered, and the other one was run over by a carriage after she got drunk. The imperial physician who "diagnosed" Prince Jing had already been quite old at the time and passed away shortly after he retired and returned to his hometown.

…Not a single one was left alive.

The emperor, who was familiar with the court's methods, immediately thought it was most likely that all of these people had been

deliberately silenced. He recalled that many things had seemed quite fishy back then.

The investigation thus came to a grinding halt only halfway done. It really gave the emperor a headache. Since it concerned Prince Jing, he summoned Prince Jing and his consort to the palace.

These days, the emperor knew how smart the consort was. Li Yu always had unique insights, and it was Li Yu who'd found the poison in Pu Liu's sealed room and saved Prince Jing. The emperor thought that he might as well ask Li Yu for his opinion.

Under the emperor's orders, Prince Jing quickly came to the palace with Li Yu.

Prince Jing's speaking skills were improving day by day. Other than a hoarse voice and being a little slow at conversation, there were no problems. Even if he stopped improving now, the emperor wouldn't mind.

"Tianchi, how are you feeling?" the emperor asked.

Prince Jing slowly answered, "Very good."

Though Prince Jing could speak now, he had no desire to chat with the emperor and was usually quite concise. The emperor, on the other hand, had prepared a bunch of questions for Prince Jing. He wanted to ask after his son, but the words just wouldn't leave his mouth.

Wang Xi had told the emperor that Prince Jing woke up early every day to read out loud in the manor, reading everything loudly from the Three Character Classic to storybooks.

Prince Jing looked cold and aloof. The emperor had no problem imagining him fighting and killing, but reading storybooks out loud…

Prince Jing had a little book tucked into his sleeve. When speaking to the emperor, he would sometimes take it out to glance at it. The emperor knew that Prince Jing used to prepare notes, but those weren't needed anymore. What was the booklet for? When Prince Jing wasn't paying attention, the emperor snuck a glance at it. It was just a bunch of strange, messy drawings.

"My consort wrote this," Prince Jing explained, smiling.

Li Yu was afraid that Prince Jing would suddenly forget how to pronounce a word, so he wrote out a list of pinyin for commonly used words in case of emergencies. Prince Jing always had it with him; even if he didn't forget any pronunciation, he would take it out to look at it.

Even having Li Yu here with him couldn't deter Prince Jing from wanting to show off.

Hm. The emperor felt that since Prince Jing had been cured of his muteness, his relationship with his consort had reached new heights. He'd initially found it amusing, but by now he'd been exposed to it so many times that he was numb to it. This was the result of seeing too much.

Back to business. After chatting with the young couple a little, the emperor fully explained the current situation.

"Royal Father, how brilliant to have found so many clues already." Li Yu was quick to flatter him. The emperor had launched a quick and thorough investigation, so the news had come quickly. Li Yu hadn't expected that everyone who was directly involved would be dead.

The emperor cleared his throat, unnerved by the sudden praise. "It's just that the leads have all become dead ends, so I do not know what to do now."

That was exactly what Li Yu was waiting for. He got to the heart of the matter at once. “The people might not be here anymore,” he said, “but *things* are. There are some things that can’t be changed… Royal Father, perhaps you should look into xuewuzi.”

The elderly imperial physician had said that xuewuzi only grew on the peaks of snowy mountains, but there were none around the empire. As a result, xuewuzi was so rare that even the Imperial Academy of Medicine didn’t have any.

“…It’s suspicious,” Li Yu said. “Why would Pu Liu have an ingredient that even the imperial physicians can’t get their hands on? And xuewuzi is usually a strengthening ingredient, but once it interacts with female ginseng, it becomes poisonous. I believe that the person behind this must be medically knowledgeable, at least when it comes to xuewuzi’s poisonous properties.”

According to the elderly imperial physician, the formula of the poisonous powder was the same as the ancient prescription Li Yu had, but with the addition of xuewuzi. Those who were unfamiliar with its properties would have assumed that the xuewuzi was added for a further nurturing and strengthening effect. Perhaps that was another way to hide the poison.

Li Yu fretted as he spoke. Xuewuzi was rare in the empire, so was it possible that it had to do with another country? There were no foreigners in the emperor’s harem, though…

For example, even though the empire was allied with Jinjue and they were friendly with one another, the emperor would only be able to accept a marriage between the princess of Jinjue and a prince who wasn’t due to

inherit. He would never accept someone from Jinjue as one of his own concubines. That was how he'd always done things.

Li Yu strongly suspected that Pu Liu's xuewuzi came from another country, but where could it have come from if there were no foreigners in the palace? Could Pu Liu have been from a foreign country?

The more Li Yu thought about it, the stranger he thought it was, and he found himself asking the question out loud.

The emperor was a bit surprised. He fell into deep thought. "I will order a new investigation into xuewuzi," he said after a while.

Realizing that the emperor didn't want to elaborate, Li Yu didn't ask any further questions.

When they left Qianqing Palace, Li Yu gently nudged Prince Jing with his elbow. "Tianchi, do you know where the nearest snowy mountains are?"

Prince Jing couldn't speak while they were outside, so he simply wrote one word into Li Yu's palm: Loulan.

"What's…Loulan?"

Li Yu was confused. He was a transmigrating fish and his geography knowledge was pitiful; Jinjue was the only neighboring country he knew, and that was only thanks to the original novel. He had never heard of Loulan before.

Prince Jing wrote, *Loulan has snowy mountains. Thirty years ago, Royal Father toppled Loulan.*

…So it was a country that no longer existed. No wonder he'd never heard of it before.

Could xuewuzi be from Loulan, then?!

Li Yu had already thought it was possible that the person who harmed Prince Jing had a grudge against the emperor. Could it be that people from Loulan had infiltrated the palace and tried to take revenge on the emperor?

Or… He recalled the glint in the emperor's eyes earlier. Could it be that the emperor had had relations with a Loulan woman and brought her into the harem? But his favorite was still Empress Xiaohui, and out of jealousy, she…hurt Prince Jing?

The more Li Yu thought, the more dramatic the imagined storyline became. Prince Jing smiled and pulled on Li Yu's sleeve.

Come with me, he signaled with his eyes.

Li Yu followed Prince Jing for a little while and was brought into a slightly familiar-looking courtyard.

Li Yu glanced at the plaque—it was Jingtai Hall!

He'd stayed in Jingtai Hall for a couple of days when he first turned into a fish, but it'd been over a year since then, and Li Yu had spent far longer in Prince Jing's manor. Jingtai Hall was now a little unfamiliar, so he didn't recognize it immediately.

The servants of Jingtai Hall bowed to their master when they saw him.

Prince Jing pulled Li Yu straight into the bedroom.

Li Yu blushed. He'd been clamoring for a daughter recently, but he'd sucked essence several times already, to the point that Prince Jing was developing dark circles, and there was still no sign of a daughter.

It was too hard without the One-Shot-and-Done stat. Li Yu was so eager for a daughter, he'd even grown a little superstitious, wondering if Prince Jing's manor just wasn't conducive to having a daughter somehow. He'd just been wanting a change of scenery. Prince Jing was a great husband; he gave Li Yu what he wanted the moment he wanted it.

Jingtai Hall was a great choice. It was emotionally significant for both of them, since it was technically where they first met.

Prince Jing, meanwhile, knew that there was something in Jingtai Hall that possibly had to do with Loulan…but in the time that it took him to grab it and turn around again, he found the carp spirit under the quilt, dewy-eyed, trying to seduce him.

Chapter 126:
Lusty, Horny Fishy

THE SHAMELESS FISH couldn't wait anymore. He patted the bed. "Tianchi, come quickly!"

Prince Jing couldn't help but laugh. He put down what he was holding and walked over to hug and kiss his fish.

Li Yu was fiddling with Prince Jing's sash, about to take it off, when a notification suddenly appeared: *‹User, the side mission "Warm Cotton Jacket" has reached the activation conditions. Please confirm whether you'd like to begin the mission and what form you would like to complete it in. One, human form. Two, fish form.…›*

Holy shit!!!

Li Yu sat up suddenly. This familiar format! And "Warm Cotton Jacket"—wasn't that what you'd call a daughter?[4]

This should be the mission that'd get them a daughter!

So, it really was a location issue! W-w-w-wasn't this…?!

"She's coming, she's coming!" Li Yu excitedly waved his arms around, planning to enter the system immediately.

Prince Jing had no idea who Li Yu thought was coming; he was just starting to get jealous when a soft noise came from outside the window. His gaze turned cold. He jumped up to the window, pulled out his sword, and stabbed it through.

His sword was blocked, and there was a crisp sound as blades connected with each other.

“…An assassin!”

On the bed, Li Yu no longer had the capacity to care about the notification. He was about to get up to lend a hand when Prince Jing, having already reached the door, suddenly came back.

“What are you doing?” Li Yu said anxiously. “Go chase him!”

Even though he could speak now, when it came to emergency situations, Prince Jing was still used to letting his actions speak for him. He patted Li Yu’s hand, then grabbed the brocade quilt and wrapped him up like a spring roll.

Li Yu knew his husband well. “All right, don’t worry,” he said quickly. “I won’t go anywhere, I…”

Prince Jing was worried that Li Yu would run out after him and put himself in danger. It was a little exasperating, but Li Yu still found it sweet.

Prince Jing nodded at Li Yu, then ran out. His guards had already begun fighting the assassin. Li Yu had promised Prince Jing he wouldn’t leave the room, so he sat on the bed, all bundled up, and looked boldly out the window.

Why did Jingtai Hall always attract assassins? He didn’t understand.

The assassin had been eavesdropping outside. They hadn’t been talking about anything serious, though—perhaps the assassin had misunderstood when Li Yu kept saying “she’s coming,” and ended up exposing himself.

Li Yu watched for a while. The guards were skilled, but he could tell the assassin was as well. They were reaching a stalemate.

But the assassin was only one person, and the number of guards kept increasing. Soon Prince Jing joined the fight; he launched a surprise attack when the assassin was distracted and kicked him in the chest, knocking him to the ground.

My husband is so cool! Li Yu was about to cheer when a guard moved forward to tie the assassin up. Eerily, the assassin chuckled coldly and committed suicide!

Everything happened so fast. The assassin used an unknown method to suddenly spray a large amount of dark liquid from his chest. Reacting quickly, Prince Jing pulled the guard aside just in time.

The liquid seemed to be a strong corrosive—the assassin soon turned into a pile of sludge. The spectating Li Yu was so shocked that he covered his mouth and shrank away from the window.

Prince Jing promptly rushed back to the room to check on Li Yu.

“Xiaoyu, don’t be afraid!” he called out in a low voice.

“I-I’m fine.” Some fear still lingered. “The assassin just now…”

“He’s been taken care of, don’t worry,” Prince Jing said.

Li Yu nodded. It wasn’t that he’d become more delicate now that he was in ancient times, but he was truly unprepared for that scene. Anyone who saw a living human turn into a puddle of goo would be frightened. It was terrifying to know there were things out there that could melt even human bodies.

But honestly, when he thought about it, that was no big deal in the face of a transmigrating fish and its system…

Frowning, Li Yu managed to make himself accept this explanation.

“Tianchi, what’s up with this assassin?” he asked.

Prince Jing helped him sit down and pointed at the item that he’d fetched earlier—a sword.

“The assassin left this last time,” he said. “They’re working together.”

Huh? There were way too many assassins at Jingtai Hall. Which time was last time?

“The female assassin,” Prince Jing reminded him.

Li Yu finally remembered. When he was still a good, mission-completing system fish, during the “Share a Bed with the Tyrant” quest, he’d run into a female assassin, who’d ended up being killed by Prince Jing.

Li Yu had always thought that the female assassin had been sent by either the Marquis of Ping or the Marquis of An—or perhaps the sixth prince, like the guy who was bitten by Xiongfeng. But it was impossible for these three people to keep challenging Prince Jing now. Where did this assassin come from? And why was Prince Jing so sure that the assassin this time was related to the female assassin from last time?

Prince Jing had evidence. He pointed to the sword that belonged to the female assassin—Li Yu could clearly see that it was an ordinary sword with a plum blossom pattern on the hilt.

Prince Jing ordered the guards to bring the sword of the most recent assassin over.

The man’s body had turned to liquid, but his sword was still fine. Li Yu realized that this sword was decorated with the same plum blossoms as the other one.

If it had been just one sword, plum blossoms wouldn’t mean anything in particular, but since both swords had it, it meant it was a marker of sorts. No wonder Prince Jing thought they were connected—Li Yu had the same suspicion now too.

“Why…did you kill the female assassin from before?” Li Yu asked carefully. He’d always wondered about this.

Prince Jing didn’t answer him directly; he just pointed to the puddle of goo on the ground. Perhaps that was the answer. If he hadn’t killed her, she would have killed herself and turned into liquid too.

Li Yu came back to his senses. “Did…you know back then, already? That they would do that?”

If Prince Jing hadn’t pulled the guard back, he might’ve been splashed. Who knew what terrifying outcome would result from that?

Prince Jing nodded. “I was attacked by these assassins once when I was younger, but I didn’t know who was behind it.”

“Could it be related to the poisoning that made you mute?” Li Yu asked worriedly. “Why didn’t you tell Royal Father?”

If Prince Jing had run into these assassins before, they had always wanted to take his life. And considering that corrosive substance, this was once again someone who was familiar with drugs and compounds, just like whoever had poisoned Prince Jing. Li Yu felt it wasn’t unreasonable to conclude that the same people were behind both incidents.

Prince Jing only silently gazed at Li Yu.

Li Yu suddenly worked it out. Prince Jing hadn't been able to tell the emperor because these assassins would simply melt away rather than allow themselves to be captured. If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, he might not have believed it, never mind the emperor—and in the past the emperor hadn't trusted Prince Jing as much as he did now.

On top of that…the female assassin's body hadn't turned into liquid because Prince Jing killed her before she could do it, but the emperor still wasn't able to find anything!

These people were powerful! They were better at hiding than the sixth prince!

In the past, when the other princes had been around, it had never been obvious who was behind this. But if the culprit chose to keep making attempts even now, they'd be sentencing themselves to death.

"Let's go! Let's tell Royal Father!" Li Yu threw the covers off, deciding to head to Qianqing Palace. He could be a witness!

Prince Jing's eyes twitched, and he pulled Li Yu back, staring at him with a strange expression. *You're going to go just like that?*

Li Yu followed his gaze down to look at his fully exposed self, the result of how eager he was for a daughter. He quickly wrapped the quilt back around himself and laughed awkwardly, "I-I forgot. Of course we'll go after I get dressed."

Once he had clothes on, they went to Qianqing Palace to see the emperor. But for once, the emperor refused to see them.

Head Eunuch Luo was attending to business and wasn't around the emperor right now, so a servant on duty at Qianqing Palace came to deliver

the message: it was getting late, and the emperor had ordered Prince Jing and his consort to return. They could talk another time.

Li Yu glanced at the moon high in the sky. It was indeed quite late.

So Prince Jing returned to the manor with Li Yu.

On the way, Li Yu chatted and laughed with Prince Jing, but he suddenly started urging him to hurry, as if he'd remembered something. When they got back, Consort Yu didn't even check in on the fish children first. He pulled Prince Jing straight into the bedroom.

Prince Jing felt like this was exactly what had happened earlier in the night, except reversed.

Li Yu was busy taking off his clothes as he walked further into the room, muttering, "Hurry, hurry! Or she'll leave!"

"…Who?" Prince Jing finally couldn't hold back his jealousy.

Li Yu couldn't help but laugh as he saw Prince Jing's dark expression. He stopped laughing, wrapped his arms around Prince Jing's neck, and whispered into his ear, blushing.

The prince's ears turned slightly red when he learned who "she" was. He wanted her to arrive too, so he kissed Li Yu on the lips and carried the indecent fish to bed.

Li Yu had been interrupted by the assassin earlier before he could choose one of the options; now, he was anxiously trying to make up for it, afraid the notification would disappear.

The notification didn't pop up immediately, but luckily, after he and Prince Jing had absorbed essence once and Prince Jing was holding him down on the bed, the system started squalling again.

“Wait, wait!”

The messy-haired Li Yu wildly clobbered the messy-haired Prince Jing. Prince Jing had to stop halfway.

“Xiaoyu?” *What’s wrong?*

“Wait for me, husband! Muah~” Li Yu soothed his husband and entered the system.

As the notification popped up, Li Yu told himself that he had to be careful and choose fish form. It didn’t hurt in fish form, so he mustn’t make the wrong choice and choose human form.

Li Yu thought this as he selected the first option and tapped confirm immediately… Only to realize that this time, the first option was human form instead of fish form!

…Holy shit!!! Why did the option order change?! Would it kill the system to not scam fish for once?!

Li Yu felt like crying when he saw that the mission was now “in progress.”

‹*System, can’t I undo the choice I made?*› Li Yu tried to haggle with the system.

The fish-scamming system took every chance it could to scam him, so it obviously wouldn’t let him undo it.

Li Yu was kicked out of the system and found his husband hugging his waist.

His thoughts were all messed up.

What should he do? On one side was his sexy husband and his long-cherished daughter, and on the other was a swollen stomach and immense

pain.

Sob, could he get off the bed and decide next time?

“Xiaoyu?” Prince Jing called out to him in a low voice, lifted his bangs out of his face, and kissed his forehead.

Which little fish had said earlier that he wasn’t allowed to leave until their daughter was here?

It was this exact same fish who’d suddenly gone into meditation.

Prince Jing hugged his fish, practically wanting to bite him everywhere. Was it so easy to be distracted when they were together?

“I…sob sob sob!” Li Yu could sense Prince Jing’s hidden frustration. With the arrow already on the bowstring, how could he not let it fly?

Li Yu was shooting himself in the foot, but he knew how to enjoy himself—now that Prince Jing could speak, Li Yu’s scalp went numb, and he found himself panting slightly every time Prince Jing called his name in that low, hoarse voice. He even forgot what his last name was. With this pleasure staring him in the face, who’d remember anything about fish or human form?

Prince Jing spent quite a lot of effort in order to make sure his daughter arrived smoothly, filling Li Yu up until he couldn’t open his eyes and was about to pass out any moment.

Finally, Prince Jing wound down and lovingly kissed Li Yu’s eyelids.

To prepare for a daughter, Li Yu had started doing a lot of strange but cute things, like putting a small, soft pillow underneath his waist so he didn’t waste anything. Prince Jing didn’t understand what he was doing at

first, but when he looked at the messy Xiaoyu, he suddenly realized what was in danger of being wasted.

He blushed. He wanted to give Li Yu a daughter too, and he had something better than a soft pillow. He reached his arm over to let Li Yu use it as a cushion.

Li Yu's back, hips, and legs were all sore, and he fell asleep immediately. When he woke up, he found that his back had been supported the whole night.

Fuck! A daughter would have to come now!

…Sob sob sob, but he'd have a large belly soon.

What should he do…

Li Yu desperately wanted this daughter, but now that she was coming, he was beside himself with worry. How much would it hurt to do this in human form?

Li Yu hated pain, but he was a father and understood his own priorities and boundaries. This was a life. Now that it was here, he couldn't say he didn't want it, especially the darling daughter he'd been looking forward to for so long.

Gazing at the peaceful sleeping face of his husband next to him, Li Yu made his decision. Experiencing birth in human form couldn't be that hard! For his husband and his daughter, he'd do it!

Chapter 127:
Fishy Daughter Pregnancy

LI YU QUESTIONED the system, wanting to know what childbirth was like in human form. It would definitely be different from when he was a fish.

He'd shoved pillows into his clothes before, but pretending was definitely different from the real thing. He was also afraid that he'd have four daughters all at once. Sob, if that really happened, would his body still function properly?

The system was quite detailed when it explained the missions around giving birth, most likely because it knew that the user was a bit unreliable at times. The system told him in no uncertain terms that in human form, he could only give birth to one child per pregnancy.

Li Yu's heart, which felt about to explode out of his chest, finally settled back down.

If it was only one, he had the courage to try it. And there were advantages to the human form too. Now that they were back in the capital under the emperor's nose, it was less risky than the fish form was, even though doing it as a fish was more convenient and painless. Though Prince Jing had reassured him that he would make all the preparations, it would be a disaster if the emperor found out—Prince Jing and the four children would be implicated too. If he was in human form, though, he was the only one who'd have to suffer a bit, and Prince Jing and the children would be safe. It would also reinforce the lies they had told back on the western border.

That's that, then, Li Yu thought to himself righteously.

The system gave him a rundown of common pregnancy facts he should know for this time. It wasn't very different from a normal human pregnancy. The system told him that when the child was born, she would be a normal baby who wouldn't turn into a fish, and she wouldn't need to complete missions as a human baby to turn into a young fish like her brothers had. Though Li Yu would suffer a little more, there was no extra danger posed to the child, which was another reason why Li Yu was willing to give it a try.

He'd confirmed with the system that he was pregnant with a daughter, but since it took human pregnancies about three months to start showing, Li Yu wasn't in any rush.

Li Yu felt bad that he'd hidden his pregnancy from Prince Jing the last time, since he was the other father. He definitely wouldn't hide anything from him this time around, he decided. As for the emperor, they'd inform him once he was further along.

Prince Jing was now the only di prince who the emperor valued, and too many people were targeting them, to the point that they were suffering from poison and assassination attempts. If he announced the pregnancy too early, Li Yu was afraid that someone would go after his unborn child. He'd transmigrated into a palace novel, after all—he didn't want to make any mistakes.

Li Yu told Prince Jing about his pregnancy first. Back when Prince Jing learned that he was pregnant with fish eggs, he'd become dizzy; now as he learned Li Yu was pregnant with a daughter and would give birth to

her in human form, he almost drowned in happiness. But he sensed that something was wrong.

“Xiaoyu, you…” Prince Jing’s inquiring eyes fell on Li Yu’s flat stomach. If this pregnancy was to take place in human form, wouldn’t he have to go through the pain of childbirth?

Li Yu understood his gaze and nodded. Prince Jing paused, realizing what a sacrifice this would be, and gripped Li Yu’s hand tightly. Li Yu was willing to endure the pain of childbirth even though he could easily lay eggs in fish form… Prince Jing was moved.

He knew very well who this was for. He decided that this would be the only time he would ever let Xiaoyu suffer like this. At least before he took over the empire. Afterward, he would help Xiaoyu hatch as many little fish as he wanted.

“I won’t let you suffer again,” he promised.

Li Yu gazed at Prince Jing with reddened eyes, touched by his sincerity. With this promise, the pain didn’t seem like such a big deal anymore.

Previously, when they were at the western border, Prince Jing had him pretend to be pregnant and waited on him as if he really was. He was better informed about pregnancy than Li Yu was, and when he learned Li Yu was pregnant this time, he immediately found a servant who was skilled in obstetrics to check Li Yu’s pulse at the same time each day.

Their daughter was still too small to reveal to anyone else, but there were some things they had to avoid due to the pregnancy. Other than taking Li Yu’s pulse, Prince Jing also gave Li Yu additional servants to take care of

him and ordered them to follow him at all times to make sure Li Yu didn't get hurt.

Li Yu was afraid the children might let it slip if he let them know too early, so he decided not to tell them yet. But although he used to pick them up quite often, recently it had become difficult. Even so, Fish Dad didn't shower them with any less love. He would still often play with them, tell them stories, and teach them the principles of being a human.

He'd heard that one had to take care of the older children's emotions when having another pregnancy. Li Yu was afraid that the children would feel anxious. But so far, they seemed fine. Li Yu had once probingly asked what they thought about him and Daddy Prince Jing giving them a younger sister. All four pairs of eyes lit up as they remembered the little girl at Uncle Ye's banquet.

"Want little sister!" The children were delighted.

Li Yu let out a sigh of relief. He could only have one child at a time in human form, but at the rate he and Prince Jing were going, there would probably be more younger brothers and sisters popping out in the future.

As Li Yu began his pregnancy journey, Prince Jing started an investigation into the assassin at Jingtai Hall—and they both waited for news from the emperor.

Prince Jing had looked into these assassins before, but because he'd been looking in the wrong direction, he came up empty-handed. This time, with Li Yu's reminder, he realized that whoever was behind the assassin could very well be the same person who'd poisoned him. They'd already hypothesized that the xuewuzi had come from Loulan, so Prince Jing

started reading ancient books about Loulan. In one of them, called *The History of Loulan*, he found a suspicious record.

"The people of Loulan were skilled at fighting and poisons. Their battles often left their opponents without bodies to bury."

This book didn't mention the specific method they used, but the way it was described definitely brought to mind the corpse-melting liquid. (Li Yu was the one who'd come up with the name "corpse-melting liquid." Prince Jing started using it himself because he thought it fit.)

This particular clue made Prince Jing more inclined to believe Li Yu's hypothesis. It seemed very likely that the same person was behind everything.

The History of Loulan also recorded the life of Chang'an-jun, the last king of Loulan. The two countries had become hostile after this Chang'an-jun had angered the emperor. Although the Loulan people were good at fighting, they were still a small country and couldn't withstand the iron cavalry of the empire. Even so, Changan-jun stubbornly resisted and held on until the end, when he was captured alive by the greatest general of the empire and taken to the capital.

The emperor was young and full of vigor back then and wasn't merciful to prisoners. To keep his life, Chang'an-jun had no choice but to give up his daughter as an imperial consort in exchange for his freedom.

Li Yu was reading *The History of Loulan* with Prince Jing, saying it was prenatal education for their daughter. Prince Jing spoiled him and let him do whatever he wanted. If Li Yu got tired, Prince Jing let him sleep on him. Frankly, their little daughter was only a few days old, not even a ball

in her daddy’s tummy, so all the prenatal education was going to Fish Dad himself.

The History of Loulan was full of twists and turns, and for once, Li Yu didn’t fall asleep as they read. He read all the following records as well and even found a brush to make notes.

The emperor once had a foreign imperial consort. But there was no such person who fit the bill in the harem now.

What did that mean?

If a consort disappeared, then either she had died or she was thrown out.

Li Yu remembered that the emperor had seemed to be deep in thought when he mentioned foreigners. If all of this had to do with the destroyed Loulan, did the emperor perhaps remember the imperial consort from Loulan?

But he hadn’t said anything about it.

Head Eunuch Luo would have the answers about the emperor’s consorts that they needed, but he was away investigating Pu Liu’s death and looking for witnesses, and he hadn’t returned to the palace yet.

At first, Li Yu thought he’d just wait to learn new clues from Head Eunuch Luo whenever he returned, and if he couldn’t wait, he could ask someone else…

Prince Jing lifted his head, his eyes flashing.

There were unknown forces in the palace, so they had to find the truth as soon as possible. The enemy might have already realized that they’d been discovered when their assassin never returned.

This enemy was more difficult than all the other princes put together, and they didn’t know what their next move might be.

Late that night, Prince Jing’s guards, on his order, brought back a dark cloth bag with someone inside—a blindfolded woman.

Prince Jing ordered Wang Xi to remove the blindfold.

The woman was wearing shabby palace clothes. She squinted uncomfortably in the sudden light, but as soon as she realized Prince Jing was in front of her, she seemed surprised and sneered at him.

“What did you bring me here for?!” she demanded, glaring at him.

Li Yu, protected by Prince Jing, was a little farther away. When he saw the woman’s face and her aura, he thought she seemed familiar, but he couldn’t put a finger on it.

That was, until a “meow” came from the bag and a cat tumbled out. The guard wasn’t sure how the cat got in there. Looking at this cat with fur so dirty one couldn’t tell its original color, and the faded haitang flowers embroidered on the woman’s handkerchief, Li Yu suddenly came to a realization.

This was Lady Qiu, the consort who had once wanted to drink thousand carp soup! And this cat was Piaoxue, the enemy Li Yu met right when he transmigrated into the book!

Wasn’t Lady Qiu in the cold palace? Why did Prince Jing order his people to sneak her out of there? Li Yu nudged Prince Jing’s arm to let him know he was confused.

Prince Jing couldn’t let outsiders find out about his new ability to speak, so he ordered Wang Xi to interrogate her for him.

“Lady Qiu,” Wang Xi said, “His Highness has something to ask you. Be smart and answer whatever he asks. Don’t think of playing any tricks. If His Highness can sneak you out without anyone noticing, he can send you back without anyone noticing too—in a body bag!”

Lady Qiu hated Prince Jing from the bottom of her heart. She wanted to ignore him. But since her life was in his hands, she had no other choice. “What do you want to know?” she said, still glaring at him fiercely.

Prince Jing glanced at Wang Xi, who said, “About one of the emperor’s consorts from Loulan.”

Lady Qiu paused and smiled, delighted. “Dead for a long time. Why are you asking about her?”

“Just answer the questions!” snapped Wang Xi. “Cut the chitchat!”

Prince Jing’s thought was that aside from Head Eunuch Luo, the older concubines who’d been with the emperor for much longer would also know about the consort from Loulan.

Lady Qiu was the perfect choice. She had been deposed by the emperor and banished to the cold palace, so he could use specific methods to meet with her that wouldn’t work on any other consort.

“You’re talking about Consort Mei?”

If Prince Jing had asked about anything else, Lady Qiu might not have been able to answer. But she at least knew of this person. *The History of Loulan* only recorded the fact that Chang’an-jun had presented his daughter to the emperor. Afterward, all it said was that she was beautiful and elegant. When she entered the palace, the emperor had rewarded her with the title of “Consort Mei.”

Li Yu's eyes lit up. "Mei" meant plum, and the assassins had plum blossoms on their sword hilts. Was this a coincidence?

It seemed that the emperor was very fond of this Consort Mei, since he rarely gave titles to his concubines. Even Lady Qiu at her most favored had never been given a title.

But Consort Mei didn't feel the same. She was handed over to the emperor by her father, Chang'an-jun, and she didn't want to enter the palace. Three days after she joined the harem, she'd tried to assassinate the emperor and was sentenced to death.

From then on, the emperor felt that it was dangerous to take on concubines who might not be loyal, so he never accepted another foreign concubine. He was also furious with Chang'an-jun. The king had originally been demoted until he didn't even have a title anymore, but because of Consort Mei, the entire Loulan royal family became slaves.

Consort Mei's story was short, complete in just a few sentences. Lady Qiu stayed where she was when she finished.

Prince Jing ordered the guards to take her back to the cold palace. She gritted her teeth and knelt down.

"I've told you everything I know. Can you do me a favor?"

Prince Jing looked at her, waiting for her to speak.

Li Yu thought she was going to ask Prince Jing to get her out of the cold palace permanently—after all, life was difficult there. But instead, Lady Qiu pointed to Piaoxue. "You can do what you want with this cat," she whispered. "I don't want it anymore."

Li Yu and Prince Jing stared at her.

With that, she got into the bag on her own. It seemed like her cat intended to follow her, but she started yelling at it before it could climb in. Piaoxue seemed to be used to being scolded—after a couple of sentences from Lady Qiu, it didn’t dare move anymore.

When it finally looked up, its owner had disappeared.

Piaoxue waited, crying miserably, but Lady Qiu never looked back.

What were they going to do with the cat?

Piaoxue had caught Li Yu once, when he was a fish. He had just transmigrated, so he was pretty confused at the time—and since fish and cats were natural enemies, he didn’t have a great impression of the cat.

If it was some other kind of small animal, he might be able to keep it to raise. What did Lady Qiu want them to do?

“Tianchi, can I…”

In the end, Piaoxue was just a cat. It hadn’t done anything wrong.

Li Yu hesitated a bit before making his decision. Piaoxue had offended Prince Jing before too. Would he agree?

Chapter 128:
Fish Helps Qiu's Cat

PRINCE JING seemed to know what Li Yu was going to ask and surprisingly shook his head at him, his gaze falling onto Li Yu's stomach. Li Yu immediately knew what he meant. He was worried that it would be inconvenient since Li Yu was pregnant.

Li Yu didn't know if he should laugh or cry. "I'm not going to raise it. I just want to find it a good home."

Though Lady Qiu had scolded the cat fiercely, Li Yu could tell that she still loved it. The cat had been in the bag with her the entire time the guards carried it over; if she really didn't want it, why would she do all this just to leave it at Prince Jing's manor?

She'd even knelt in front of Prince Jing for her cat. Though she cursed at it a lot, she was actually helping it escape. It must have been living with her in the cold palace since she was deposed.

Lady Qiu, who was once flattered and sought after by many, now only had a cat by her side. Flattery when everything was going well could not compare to the company kept when one hit rock bottom.

It was unexpected that the once cold, aloof Noble Consort would lower her head for the sake of a cat…

Li Yu judged the case in isolation. It wasn't a matter of principle; just like Lady Qiu said, she'd answered Prince Jing's questions and thus hoped Prince Jing could help her.

It was a simple exchange.

Prince Jing had originally refused because he was afraid that Li Yu and the unborn child would be in danger. But if Li Yu wasn't going to raise the cat himself, he had no reason to object.

With his mind made up, Li Yu asked Wang Xi to note down which families were a good fit for the cat. This wasn't a hard task at all, and Wang Xi quickly found a good family that was well-off and willing to raise a cat. Piaoxue definitely wouldn't go hungry there, so it ought to be a pretty good place for it.

Wang Xi quickly took the cat over. Li Yu even had him bring a couple of things the cat might like too, worried that Piaoxue would throw a tantrum at being given away so suddenly.

Everything was fine at first, but the next day, the family came to tell them that the cat had disappeared in the middle of the night.

Li Yu froze. What were they going to do about this?

He'd messed things up somehow by trying to help out. Since he was the one who'd asked Wang Xi to find the cat a home, he couldn't just ignore it. Li Yu hesitated for a moment before asking Wang Xi to look for Piaoxue.

A couple of days passed, and Wang Xi didn't find the cat.

Then, in the middle of the night, Li Yu was woken by a cat wailing outside his window. Prince Jing guided Li Yu outside and they found Piaoxue in the yard, being chased around by Li Yu's pet ducks and rabbit. The pet ducks and rabbit weren't scared of the cat at all.

Prince Jing intervened and separated the animals, pulling Piaoxue to the side.

The cat was dirtier than it had been a couple of days ago, and when it saw Prince Jing and Li Yu, it wailed more and more pitifully.

Did the cat disappear to run back here? Li Yu wondered. But the cat didn't even know them that well, so why would it come to look for them?

Piaoxue kept meowing. Wang Xi gave it some food, and Piaoxue ran over, sniffed it, licked it, walked away, and kept meowing.

What was up with this cat?

Li Yu was confused. He didn't understand what the cat wanted.

But as a pet…

Li Yu grinned. He was a pet too! If his owner gave him to someone else, he…would be unhappy, and even more than that…he would want to look for his owner!

So Piaoxue probably wanted to return to Lady Qiu?

Since it had been taken out of the cold palace in a bag, Piaoxue didn't know the way back. Had it come back to Prince Jing's manor because it was the only place it knew, and it was hoping they would bring it home?

Li Yu turned to Prince Jing. "Tianchi, can you help me with something?"

Prince Jing guessed what he was thinking and smiled. "No need to ask. My people are yours."

Li Yu nodded, beaming. He ordered the guard who'd brought Lady Qiu over to send the cat back to her.

He and Lady Qiu were both wrong to assume that Piaoxue would be happier after leaving the difficult conditions in the cold palace. Perhaps to

Piaoxue, a gold or silver bed could never compare to a bed next to its owner.

Even Li Yu himself thought Prince Jing was his home. It was the same logic.

Piaoxue seemed to understand when Li Yu asked the guards to take it back; its sapphire-like eyes shone brightly.

Before they left, Wang Xi wanted to give the cat a bath and wipe it clean, but it broke free from Wang-gonggong and ran to a corner of the courtyard. It dug up something from the dirt there and ran over and dropped it at Li Yu's feet.

Wang Xi picked it up. It was a small dried fish.

The corner of Li Yu's mouth twitched. *Thanks a lot, I guess! Giving a fish dried fish!*

The guard had just left with Piaoxue when the system refreshed.

‹User, "Sharing a Country with the Tyrant" is in progress. Please be prepared.›

Huh? What did sending Piaoxue away have to do with "Sharing the Country"?! But the system obviously thought it was connected somehow, so maybe it would be revealed soon.

He'd always assumed that the mission would only progress once Prince Jing ascended to the throne, but apparently that wasn't the case…

The guard soon came back to tell Li Yu that Lady Qiu was very happy to see her cat returned. Apparently she had regretted her decision as soon as she returned to the cold palace, and she said that she would never

send Piaoxue away again. Though Li Yu had made everyone do a bunch of pointless work for Piaoxue, the conclusion was unexpectedly satisfying.

The guard also told Li Yu that the guards at the cold palace were, for some reason, much more lax than usual.

Li Yu didn't quite understand the guard's words, but Prince Jing frowned a little.

The cold palace was filled with people who'd been punished because they had fallen out of favor with the emperor. The guards there rarely changed, so why had they changed now?

Prince Jing thought about it for a long time. In the end, he ordered Wang Xi to send a letter to the palace. This was unusual—Prince Jing had people in the palace, but he almost never contacted them.

But even after a night had passed, there was no news from the palace.

Even Li Yu felt like something was off. Had Prince Jing's people run into something unexpected?

Prince Jing hadn't seen the emperor in a couple of days, so he entered the palace to ask to meet him. If there really were Loulan forces in the palace, that would also pose a threat to the emperor.

According to the rules, if he wanted to meet the emperor he had to make a request, but before Wang Xi even managed to step out of the manor, the palace servants showed up.

"Your Highness Prince Jing, Consort. The emperor has summoned you."

The person who came to pass along the message was an unfamiliar servant. It would usually have been Head Eunuch Luo or one of the

servants who worked under him—Wang Xi was very familiar with all of them. Hearing this message from a stranger instead put Wang Xi on guard, and he asked the servant some questions. The servant didn't like to speak, though, so after a few questions he took out the edict and placed it in front of them.

When Wang Xi saw the edict, complete with the seal, there was nothing he could say.

The emperor had summoned both of them, but Prince Jing didn't want Li Yu to tire himself out, so he wanted to go on his own and ask for forgiveness on Li Yu's behalf.

But Li Yu held his arm. "I rest all the time, so how could I be tired?" he said, smiling. "Don't worry." Just because he was pregnant didn't mean he couldn't walk anymore. He thought Prince Jing was being a little overprotective.

Besides, the emperor's edict only required that they go to see him. By now, Li Yu had seen the emperor several times already and was quite familiar with the whole affair, so there was no need to disobey the emperor. Prince Jing was only a step away from the position of crown prince. It wouldn't be worth it now to do something that made the emperor unhappy, or anything else that might lead to criticism.

Li Yu wore a "Take me, I'm super sweet!" expression, and Prince Jing laughed and agreed. But he still insisted on bringing several extra servants to take care of Li Yu.

Li Yu suddenly remembered that "Share the Country" had been refreshed. Could this trip to the palace have something to do with Prince Jing ascending to the throne? Was it an important event?

There were still hostile forces in the palace. Out of caution, Li Yu placed a couple of things in his inventory, including a sharp dagger.

They got to the palace quickly, but the servant didn't take them directly to Qianqing Palace. Instead, he led them to Qianqiu Hall and had them wait inside.

No sooner had they entered and sat down than several teams of guards came and surrounded the hall.

"The emperor has been feeling unwell," the servant said apologetically. "These are the emperor's orders. Please forgive us, Your Highness. The other princes are at Qianqing Palace right now, and the emperor requests that you join them as soon as possible."

Prince Jing and Li Yu glanced at each other, sensing something was wrong. The emperor had been in great health the last time they'd seen him—how had he become unwell in just a few days? And why hadn't the servant mentioned it before they left the manor?

The emperor hadn't been sick around this time in the novel…

No, the plot had changed long ago.

Li Yu's heart was beating furiously. He stopped the servant to ask, "How is Royal Father feeling? Which imperial physician has seen him? What was the diagnosis?"

The servant hesitated. "The emperor caught a chill at night, and it may be a cold. Imperial physician…all of the imperial physicians are with him. Please rest assured, Consort."

The servant was quite unclear in his answers, and some details that should have been obvious were wrong. Head Eunuch Luo would have never

made this mistake, but not only was this servant incorrect, he had to be prompted before he would say anything.

Li Yu had a bad feeling about this. Was there something to hide about the emperor being unwell?

There were a lot of guards surrounding Qianqiu Hall, while the number of guards at the cold palace had decreased.

Li Yu and Prince Jing couldn't help but glance at each other again. Li Yu could tell that Prince Jing thought it was suspicious too.

The servant seemed to want to separate them. "I've already come to the palace," Li Yu said hesitantly. "Why don't I go with His Highness?"

But the servant stopped him and said with a troubled expression, "The emperor summoned you to the palace, but he only asked His Highness to meet him at Qianqing Palace. You should wait here. Perhaps the emperor will summon you soon."

The servant kept citing the emperor's orders, so it was difficult for Li Yu to oppose him. No matter what they were hiding, Prince Jing had to follow the emperor's orders and go. That was the only way to find out what was happening with the emperor.

Prince Jing pulled Li Yu closer and straightened his slightly crooked collar.

"Tianchi…" Li Yu said softly, wanting to remind Prince Jing to be safe.

Prince Jing nodded and took Li Yu's hand. He quickly wrote "guard" in his palm, to remind Li Yu that the guards would protect him. He'd already thought of everything Li Yu was afraid of or worried about.

Prince Jing shook his hand again, as if he was saying goodbye.

“Your Highness, wait,” Li Yu said after a moment’s thought. “Let me fix your collar first.”

The servant, who’d been staring at them the entire time, thought this was a bit too sappy and turned his face away quietly.

Li Yu quickly adjusted Prince Jing’s collars and cuffs. He even crouched down to check his cloud-patterned boots. Prince Jing hadn’t been expecting this; surprised, he moved to help him up. But Li Yu shushed him silently with a finger.

Under Prince Jing’s gaze, he quickly tucked the dagger into his husband’s boot.

Chapter 129:
Fish Becoming Smart

AFTER PRINCE JING left, Li Yu ordered the guards to stand guard in the hall so he could calmly go over recent events.

Perhaps he felt a little bit calmer these days because the sixth prince was imprisoned, Prince Jing's muteness was cured, and he'd become pregnant with their daughter. Meanwhile, they were much closer to discovering the identities of the people behind Prince Jing's poisoning.

Prince Jing was still in the middle of his investigation, so he hadn't had enough time to complete his preparations. Li Yu believed in Prince Jing's protagonist halo without thinking—he assumed that Prince Jing would definitely be able to overcome anything, even though none of this had been mentioned in the original novel.

Thus, they'd been caught off guard by the enemy.

Now that he thought about it, the emperor had begun to avoid them when they mentioned that the enemy could be related to Loulan. Could it be that right then, the emperor had fallen under someone's control, instead of simply starting to avoid them for his own reasons?

When he'd mentioned that xuewuzi grew on snowy mountains, it had been clear from the emperor's expression that he knew something.

Head Eunuch Luo had been gone for a long time as well. Li Yu had been careless; perhaps he'd been captured too.

Without Luo Ruisheng, the emperor was missing a layer of protection. Even though there were imperial guards around him, the enemy

had hidden in the palace for so many years that if they decided to attack, the emperor would probably fall into their trap.

No…he might have fallen into a trap already.

Even the guards in the cold palace had changed. That meant the enemy might already be in control of the guards—they might even be able to use imperial edicts to summon people to the palace.

The more Li Yu thought about it, the more he regretted it. Why hadn't he thought of this earlier? They didn't know the emperor's current status, and Prince Jing had gone to Qianqing Palace.

Please, let him be all right.

Though Prince Jing would always come out safe according to the system's rules, Li Yu didn't want the emperor to come to any harm either. The emperor was one of the only people in this world who treated Prince Jing well.

In the original novel, after the emperor was injured by the sixth prince, he remained bedridden for the rest of his life. Li Yu had thought that the sixth prince was the one behind everything, so he assumed that as long as Prince Jing defeated the sixth prince, the emperor would be fine.

Who would have expected a hidden boss?

Did this boss…exist in the original novel?

The answer was definitely yes. Prince Jing was mute in the original book, and Li Yu had seen Prince Jing's children speaking in the system. That wasn't a coincidence. Prince Jing in the novel must have been poisoned as well, by the same people.

But why did the enemy fail to face Prince Jing in the book?

Perhaps because…

In the original book, the fight between Prince Jing and the sixth prince was fierce. The sixth prince's influence remained strong until Prince Jing bathed the court in blood. Whoever was behind his poisoning had always stayed hidden; perhaps Prince Jing had accidentally wiped them out in the process.

Or perhaps they were allied with the sixth prince and Prince Jing took them out in the assumption that they were one of his lackeys.

But now Prince Jing had successfully defeated the sixth prince, who barely had any supporters anymore. And Prince Jing wasn't a tyrant either, and wouldn't bathe the palace in blood like he had in the novel.

That was why this mysterious force had come to light. Were they going to do something to the emperor?

Li Yu and Prince Jing had found out about Loulan and Consort Mei. Those people all had good reason to hold a grudge against the emperor.

There were probably a lot of people involved, so how did they all stay concealed?

Li Yu had previously hypothesized that the person who poisoned Prince Jing most likely had a high status.

Those related to the royal family could be ruled out, as they lived outside the palace. It would have been impossible for them to detain the emperor in such a short amount of time. Then, within the palace—he thought of the consorts. Among the consorts, who could be related to Loulan or Consort Mei?

Were they originally from Loulan, or did they have some other sort of past with Loulan or Consort Mei? The latter didn't seem likely. Consort

Mei had been sentenced to death just a few days after entering the harem…

Li Yu was still trying to think when the servant who'd separated him and Prince Jing came looking for him.

"Consort, the young shizi won't stop crying in the imperial study room. Please come and help."

Li Yu's heart skipped a beat. "When I left the manor, he was still there," he said, doing his best to calm down. "Why is he suddenly in the palace?"

The servant smiled. "The emperor summoned him, just a little bit later than you, Consort." Predicting that Li Yu wouldn't believe him, the servant took out a silver bracelet.

The guard next to Li Yu was one of Prince Jing's. He took the bracelet and only handed it to Li Yu after making sure there was nothing wrong with it.

Li Yu examined it closely. The bracelet was rounded, meant for a child's wrist, and there were no sharp engravings. There was a small, etched fish symbol colored with gold powder on the inside of the bracelet. Dabao had been golden when he was a young fish. Li Yu was very familiar with the fish symbol on the inside of the bracelet; he'd drawn the shape himself and Prince Jing had ordered someone to carve it in.

This was no doubt Dabao's silver bracelet.

Li Yu felt a chill creeping all the way up his body from his feet, and he could barely keep himself upright.

Back at Prince Jing's manor, Wang Xi had been left to take care of the children while Prince Jing and the consort entered the palace. Wang-

gonggong was very fond of the children and happy to play with them, even if he had to become a horse for the young masters to ride.

Not long after Prince Jing and the consort left, someone else from the palace came, saying that the emperor had ordered the young shizi to the palace.

It was common for the young shizi to enter the palace. When Wang Xi saw the servant had a token to enter and leave the palace, he busied himself with making tea while he ordered the other servants to pack up Dabao's belongings. But the servant said this was an urgent summon and that there was no need for Wang Xi to waste his time.

Why would he call preparing the young master a "waste"?

Wang Xi didn't really like how the servant spoke. When he went to pick up Dabao, Dabao caught a glimpse of a servant he'd never seen before and hid behind Wang Xi in fear and hugged his arm, whispering, "Dabao won't go!"

Wang Xi patted Dabao on the back comfortingly.

"Be good, young master," the servant said, smiling. "The consort is waiting for you in the palace. I'll take you to see him right now."

Dabao shook his head like a rattle. In the past, Grandpa Emperor always sent Head Eunuch Luo to pick Dabao up, or his two daddies would take him. Fish Dad told him that strangers who used his name to whisk the fish babies away would…lock them up, not let them eat, and not let them see Fish Dad!

"Dabao won't go!" Dabao was stubborn.

"Daddy said, it's scary!" the other children agreed.

Sibao, who was usually the most confused, didn’t hesitate: “You’re a bad guy!”

Looking embarrassed, the servant tried to convince Wang Xi instead.

“His Highness and the consort aren’t here, so I defer to the young masters,” Wang Xi replied coldly. “If the young shizi doesn’t want to, then I will accept a future punishment.”

Realizing that even orders from the emperor were useless, the servant excused himself angrily, saying that he would ask for further instructions from the palace.

Wang Xi comforted the children, his expression turning serious. All the recent visitors from the palace had been unfamiliar faces, so the oral edict may have been fake. How dare they pretend to be carrying out the emperor’s will!

Wang Xi was now worried about his two masters’ safety. If the summons was fake, then was it possible that the edict was fake as well? Something must have happened in the palace!

Wang Xi was concerned that the servant might come back with more people, so he made a bold decision to bring the children to the House of Cheng’en and ask the former Duke of Cheng’en for protection.

The House of Cheng’en had always helped Prince Jing when needed. When he learned that Wang Xi had brought the children, Ye Qinghuan came out himself to greet them and brought the children to see the former Duke of Cheng’en. Wang Xi didn’t dare embellish the story when faced with Ye Qian, so he simply recounted the visits from two separate rounds of servants and how Prince Jing and his consort entered the palace.

Ye Qian, holding Erbao and Sanbao, was deep in thought for a long time. It sounded like something was definitely wrong. He had Ye Qinghuan go to find out more.

Ye Qinghuan returned shortly and reported that the palace doors were all closed. The guards bluntly told him that the emperor had ordered no one to enter without his permission.

It looked like something really had happened at the palace. Ye Qian didn't dare delay any longer. He ordered the Duke of Cheng'en to follow him to Prince Li's manor.

Though the emperor wasn't letting anyone into the palace, Prince Li was the head of the Imperial Clan Court and the emperor's younger brother, so he had certain privileges. If he wanted to enter the palace, the guards wouldn't be able to stop him.

Ye Qian needed the support of the royal family and Prince Li.

Li Yu had identified Dabao's small silver bracelet.

For a moment, his heart sank, but he remembered the lessons he learned at the western border—he told himself that he had to calm down and not make the same mistakes he had then.

Trying his best to steady his breathing, he pretended to not recognize the bracelet. Without waiting for the servant's reaction, he tossed the silver bracelet back at him and ducked into a room.

He ordered his guards to guard the door and immediately entered the system. A silver bracelet on its own didn't mean anything. He had other ways to confirm the children's safety. In an ancient world where long-

distance communication was done by shouting, he still had the system—his golden finger!

Li Yu clicked on the “Fish Children Status” option in the system to check on them one by one.

Fortunately, he found the four children were all together, laughing and babbling alongside a beautiful little girl. Wang Xi was silently standing to the side.

That little girl… Li Yu recognized her. It was Qinghe-junzhu!

Then he noticed the former Duke of Cheng’en, as well as Ye Qinghuan and his wife! The children were at the House of Cheng’en! Though he didn’t know why they were there, Li Yu knew that he could stop worrying if they were with the former Duke of Cheng’en!

It was foolish of them to try and trick him with the silver bracelet. Dabao must have lost it…

After a bit, Li Yu recalled that Mu Tianxiao had once sent a confidant to sneak into Prince Jing’s manor through the wet nurse, Madam Qin. Blood wasn’t the only thing that was taken then—a small silver bracelet disappeared as well.

It was probably the same one!

The sixth prince was already imprisoned, so why was the bracelet, taken by the sixth prince’s confidant, in the hands of an enemy linked to Loulan? It didn’t make sense for them to be working together. If they were, why hadn’t they stepped forward to help the sixth prince when he was in trouble? Why did they choose to make a move now?

Li Yu felt like he was closing in on the truth.

They were still trying to pressure him from outside the room, but he figuratively dug a hole for them and sprinkled some dirt on it.

“My apologies. I’m still waiting for His Highness to come back; I can’t leave. If Dabao won’t stop crying, then please bring him here.”

He wanted to see how they would try to cover up their lie!

Chapter 130:
Fishy Playing Dumb

THE SERVANT obviously couldn't produce Dabao out of thin air, so he kept trying to convince Li Yu to go over there himself.

Li Yu now felt even more certain that this was a trap, and so they came to a stalemate.

He was quickly analyzing everything in his mind. The children were safe, and he and Prince Jing were temporarily separated in the palace. If the enemy was still attempting to trap him with a lie about Dabao, they must not be ready to expose themselves yet. They just wanted to get him to go on his own and leave Prince Jing's guards behind.

Perhaps they were wary of Prince Jing's guards. Li Yu sensed that they didn't have full control of the palace yet, so they didn't dare confront Prince Jing's guards head-on and had to try to deceive him. If he'd fallen for it, he might have been captured and used to threaten Prince Jing…

Was waiting the only thing he could do now?

Prince Jing had gone to Qianqing Palace alone. Though he had the protagonist's halo, Li Yu was still quite worried.

If he could think of a way to help Prince Jing by delivering the news to Ye Qinghuan and the others outside the palace, the former Duke of Cheng'en might be able to find a way in. Even if he couldn't, it would be good to throw a wrench in the enemy's plans. But he was stuck in Qianqiu Hall, surrounded by guards. How was he going to get news out?

Li Yu gave it some thought. Since the other party was trying to deceive him, he might as well take advantage of that and use the opportunity to escape! They definitely wouldn't be expecting that!

And as for how he'd do that…

He was still pregnant with their daughter. He wasn't sure if he wanted to risk it, and didn't know if it would work.

‹User,› the system chose this moment to interrupt. *‹The main mission 'Sharing the Country with the Tyrant' is in progress, so the durability of your scales is doubled and is effective as protection. Please take care.›*

…The system reminded him that his stats were doubled. His scales were already hard enough normally that even smashing through the crystal bottle didn't hurt him, so if it was doubled on top of that, he should have no problems even with his daughter! It even counted as a form of protection!

No matter how often the fish-scamming system tricked him, it was still quite reliable at critical moments. Li Yu couldn't let this opportunity slip by, so he decided to trust himself and the system.

He confidently told the servant, "I can't leave right now even though Dabao is crying, but I'm quite worried. I did bring the pet fish from the manor, and Dabao loves this fish. If you bring it to him, he might become more well-behaved."

The servant didn't expect Prince Jing's consort to be so hard to persuade. Not only did he refuse to leave with him, he even asked him to deliver a fish? The servant hesitated to answer, afraid that the consort had some hidden plan.

Li Yu pretended to not see his hesitation. "This is His Highness's favorite fish," he added with a smile. "Please be extremely careful."

Prince Jing’s love for raising fish was well-known throughout the capital, and the servant had heard of it as well. The servant figured that having this pet fish in his hands might be useful for making Prince Jing comply later, so he nodded and agreed to “deliver the fish.”

Li Yu said that he had to pack things up and returned to the palace room. Then, whispering to the guards, he ordered them to wait outside the door.

Soon after, the door opened and, as instructed, a guard went inside. He came out with a huge crystal bottle, with a silver koi with golden scales swimming happily inside it.

The guard walked over with the bottle and informed the servant that this was the fish the consort wanted to give to the young shizi.

The servant took the bottle. With a quick glance at it, he left on his own with the bottle, barring the guard from following him.

Prince Jing’s oldest son wasn’t actually in the palace, so it was impossible to give it to Dabao, nor could he send it to Qianqing Palace. The servant decided to keep the fish for now and deal with it later.

Li Yu knew this servant was definitely dishonest. There were a lot of places in the palace with water, so his initial plan was to break the crystal bottle as soon as he got closer to some water and jump in. As long as he was in water, he could swim away. What did he have to fear?

So he stayed in the crystal bottle, quietly waiting for an opportunity. Suddenly, someone came over and stopped the suspicious servant.

“Stop. What is that in your hand?” the person asked.

“Sixth Highness,” the servant greeted him.

Li Yu was shocked. How could there be a Sixth Highness in the palace right now? Turning his fish body around, he swam closer to the wall of the bottle. Sure enough, he saw Mu Tianxiao's scarred, unhealed face.

The sixth prince had once tried to assassinate the emperor. The emperor definitely wouldn't have forgiven the sixth prince, but he was now out of prison and could even wander around the palace freely. This meant that the emperor must be under his control, and his release definitely had something to do with this mysterious force related to Loulan.

No matter how unlikely Li Yu had thought it was before, it was confirmed when the sixth prince appeared. He stared at him nervously. What…did the sixth prince want to do?

Mu Tianxiao observed the fish in the crystal bottle for a while. "Is this Prince Jing's fish?"

The servant nodded.

Mu Tianxiao no longer had to play nice. "I'll bring it over," he said, smiling cruelly. He grabbed the crystal bottle, uninterested in any arguments.

His icy gaze fell on Li Yu, who froze.

He knew that the sixth prince had asked about the fish several times already. Was he suspicious of the fish? He had to pretend to be a brainless fish as fast as he could! An unintelligent fish wouldn't under-stand what the sixth prince was saying, and definitely wouldn't feel afraid.

Li Yu forced himself to keep on swimming around in the crystal bottle under the sixth prince's intense gaze.

Mu Tianxiao couldn't find anything wrong with the fish, but he thought of an idea. He started striding toward Qianqing Palace with the

crystal bottle in hand.

Sob sob sob, his fishy fate wasn't in his own hands! He had to change his plan—meeting up with his husband was okay too!

Li Yu's husband had already been sitting in Qianqing Palace for thirty minutes.

He still hadn't seen the emperor. The concubines were all there, as well as the seventh and eighth princes. There were a lot of people, but nobody said anything. They just sat in a group, staring at each other uneasily.

Thanks to his cold personality, Prince Jing wasn't very close to any of them.

The eighth prince walked over, eyeing him pitifully. "Fifth Royal Brother, can…I sit next to you?"

After what had happened at the hunting festival, the eighth prince felt that it was safest near Prince Jing. Prince Jing smiled slightly and nodded, letting him sit.

Soon after, the seventh prince trotted over and sat next to the eighth prince.

There was a noise from deeper within the hall, and a servant announced, "The emperor is here!"

Prince Jing focused in, and not long after, the emperor emerged, surrounded by a bunch of servants. Prince Jing observed carefully that the emperor looked pale and in poor spirits. Consort Zhang was standing behind him, and behind her was Noble Lady Chu.

The emperor seemed as if he was actually gravely ill. He needed help after taking just a few steps, and his breathing was labored. The emperor quickly sat on the dragon throne, and a servant placed a cup of tea next to his hand.

The emperor waved his hand irritably and didn't take it. The servant put it on the table in front of the emperor and moved to the side.

Not long after, Consort Zhang came over to pick up the cup of tea and personally put it next to his lips. This time, the emperor drank some. Consort Zhang called for a handkerchief and dotingly wiped the drops of tea that fell onto the dragon robe.

Chu Yanyu, Noble Lady Chu, brought a soft pillow and put it behind the emperor's back.

The concubines thus realized that Consort Zhang was probably above them all now, as she seemed to be enjoying the emperor's favor. Consort Zhang and the sixth prince were the ones who'd brought Noble Lady Chu to the palace, so he was in cahoots with them and naturally rose in position alongside them.

But the sixth prince had been thrown into prison, and Consort Zhang was usually a quail—how had the quail become the favorite?

When Prince Jing saw Consort Zhang and Chu Yanyu arrive with the emperor, he realized something was wrong.

The emperor saw Prince Jing too. His eyes fluttered and his lips moved. But Consort Zhang lightly smiled, and the spark in the emperor's eyes dimmed. He nodded apathetically at Prince Jing.

Prince Jing noticed the slight change in the emperor's expression. He understood that the emperor was a bit wary of Consort Zhang. It was

strange that she had suddenly become “the favorite” in the couple of days that he hadn’t seen the emperor.

“Tianchi, you’re here too,” the emperor said.

Prince Jing and the emperor had agreed privately beforehand that he couldn’t reveal his muteness had been cured, so he simply silently bowed his head as he usually did.

The emperor had looked startled when he saw Prince Jing, which meant he wasn’t the one who’d issued the edict summoning Prince Jing here. And there were many more guards around Qianqing Palace than usual. Head Eunuch Luo was still missing.

Prince Jing calmly memorized the positioning of all the guards in the main hall, in case he needed to know it in the future.

The emperor glanced at Consort Zhang and said to a servant nearby, “Summon the sixth prince. I have an announcement.”

The servant agreed verbally, but he kept looking at Consort Zhang. She smiled and said, “Even Prince Jing is here. How could we leave the Marquis of An and the Marquis of Ping out?”

The Marquis of An and the Marquis of Ping had actually been summoned to the palace in advance, just as Prince Jing was, and were currently waiting in the side hall.

The emperor immediately changed his mind. “All right. Go summon the Marquis of An and the Marquis of Ping. I have an announcement.”

When the concubines heard this, they looked at each other. With the addition of the two marquises, all the princes would be there. What was the emperor’s announcement?

The Marquis of An and the Marquis of Ping filed in one after another. The Marquis of An's mind was still hazy, and a servant helped him to a spot slightly farther away.

The Marquis of Ping had fallen out of favor for a long time, but now he was finally being summoned by the emperor. He hurriedly scampered to the foot of the throne. "Royal Father, since you're feeling unwell, I'll do anything you need, through hell or high water."

The Marquis of Ping would have carved out his own heart for the emperor if he could.

"Tianming, go sit next to the Marquis of An." The emperor rubbed his forehead and assigned him to a farther spot as well.

The Marquis of Ping saw his hope fading away again, so he obeyed, embarrassed.

"Summon the sixth prince," the emperor said again.

This time, Consort Zhang nodded. The servant quickly left—and came back just as quickly, because he'd run into the sixth prince, who was already rushing over.

When Mu Tianxiao entered, he had already changed out of the stained clothing he wore in prison. Though there were still injuries on his face, every movement he made was full of glee.

As he entered, he purposefully shot Prince Jing an aggressive glance. Prince Jing's eyes met his, his expression unchanging as the sixth prince walked to the emperor.

Mu Tianxiao didn't bother acting in front of the emperor anymore and clasped his hands together in a casual greeting. Without waiting for the emperor's permission to sit, he found a seat nearby and sat down.

The emperor stared at him coldly but didn’t object.

How could the sixth prince behave so wildly in front of the emperor? And why did the emperor permit it?

Prince Jing had already guessed that Consort Zhang was behind it. The way she carried herself was completely different, and from the way the emperor treated her, it was clear that she was holding him hostage somehow—which meant the sixth prince was left unchecked.

The other concubines present had also come to the same conclusion. They’d never seen such a scene before, and they were all too frightened to speak.

“Fifth Royal Brother, long time no see. Why don’t I give you a gift to commemorate the occasion?” The sixth prince taunted Prince Jing with a smile.

Several servants came in, holding something in their hands.

Even Prince Jing, who was usually calm in the face of danger, was stunned when he saw what they were carrying. The servants had brought in a crystal bottle holding a silver-colored koi speckled with gold.

The fish was already wagging its tail, but after seeing Prince Jing, his tail flapped even more vigorously.

Ah, husband! I’m so glad you’re all right! We finally meet again!

Li Yu happily spit out a trail of bubbles.

Chapter 131:
Fish-Style Cooperation

A STORM RAGED in Prince Jing's heart. He didn't know how Xiaoyu had fallen into the sixth prince's hands, but he had to get him back as soon as possible and save the emperor!

Prince Jing had already noted where the guards were stationed. He had an idea.

"…I know Fifth Royal Brother cares for this fish a lot and desperately wants it back. But I'm afraid it won't be so easy." Mu Tianxiao was playing with the gold chain on the crystal bottle and staring down at Prince Jing, grinning like he'd won. "But since you 'helped' me when I was in prison, I'm willing to 'help' you as well. If you're willing to go through all that I suffered in prison, I may decide to be generous and return this fish to you."

The sixth prince beamed, as if he was touched by his own sincerity.

Li Yu also heard what the sixth prince said, and he was furious. Unfortunately, his fins were too short for him to flip the sixth prince off. How dare the trashy Mu Tianxiao use him to threaten his husband! He was afraid that Prince Jing wouldn't think it through and might actually do as the sixth prince said.

Sob, he didn't want his husband to suffer! Someone like the sixth prince couldn't be trusted!

No, this fish had to save his husband!

Li Yu pressed his fish body close to the bottom of the crystal bottle and pointed his tail at the sixth prince.

The emperor couldn't stand it anymore and scolded the sixth prince lightly. "Tianxiao, it's just a fish. Why treat him like that?"

"Royal Father, you said yourself that it's 'just a fish,'" the sixth prince retorted, not even bothering to raise his head. "If Fifth Royal Brother ignores me, what can I do? Royal Father, I know that you have your favorites, but you can't bear to see him suffer even a little?"

The emperor was furious with the sixth prince's attitude, but he was afraid of making things worse for Prince Jing, so he could only shut up.

The sixth prince lazily glanced at Prince Jing. "Fifth Royal Brother, hurry up. If you put me in a bad mood, I might just change my mind."

Prince Jing had already determined that the emperor was being threatened by Consort Zhang, and now the sixth prince was threatening him with Xiaoyu. Prince Jing pursed his lips, his gaze cold, and reached toward the hem of his robes, his knees slightly bent.

This position made it look like he was going to kneel, and the sixth prince let out an incredibly smug exclamation of excitement. Since Prince Jing had never let him take a closer look at the fish, he opened the crystal bottle and made to touch the fish's soft tail, deliberately trying to provoke Prince Jing. He wanted Prince Jing to personally experience what it was like for everything to be under the sixth prince's control. Even Prince Jing's favorite pet fish had to listen to him; he could do whatever he wanted.

However, just as his fingers were about to touch the fish, things suddenly changed. The fish jumped out forcefully, smashing through the crystal bottle. As the sixth prince watched the fish fly out, he thought this

scene seemed familiar. But it was too late. Silver light, enveloped in a strong wind—before the sixth prince could react, his face was firmly slapped by something as hard as iron, and he saw stars!

The sixth prince cupped his stinging face, stunned. Prince Jing's fish had not only broken out of the crystal bottle, he realized belatedly, but it had slapped him ferociously—with that harmless, soft-looking fish tail!

The fish didn't stop after that slap—it kept flapping about midair. While the sixth prince was still dazed, the fish slapped him a second time at lightning speed!

After two successive loud slapping sounds shook the quiet of Qianqing Palace, the sixth prince's cheeks began to visibly swell.

Everyone present heard and saw that the sixth prince had been slapped by a fish for some reason. Consort Zhang knit her brows, and the emperor tried his best to keep it together so his lips wouldn't curl into a smile.

The Marquis of An, who was a little farther away, saw everything as well. In his confused mind he thought the scene seemed a bit familiar, and he clapped, laughing. "Good slap! Good slap!"

The sixth prince was about to start cursing when he noticed a figure flashing before him. Something was wrong—when the fish broke out of the crystal bottle, Prince Jing had pulled a sharp dagger out from his boot and stabbed several nearby guards. While the sixth prince was simmering in the anger and disbelief of being slapped by a fish, Prince Jing had already put the dagger to his neck.

That was how skilled Prince Jing was. He had managed to restrain the sixth prince under everyone's noses.

"Wh-what are you trying to do?" Mu Tianxiao gulped, terrified by the cold light of the dagger. He could use chains to choke his own wife

without hesitation, but when a dagger was held to his own throat, he was so scared his legs turned to jelly.

But who wouldn’t be afraid under such circumstances?

With one hand, Prince Jing held the dagger against the sixth prince’s throat, and with the other, he caught the fish midair with his sleeve.

Li Yu knew that the emperor was being coerced and that Prince Jing needed an opportunity to strike. He also couldn’t stand the thought of being touched by the sixth prince, so he decided he might as well be the one to create some unexpected chaos.

Prince Jing cleaned up after him often before, so he was no stranger to Li Yu’s antics. Before Li Yu broke out of the crystal bottle, he’d noticed Prince Jing pause slightly, as if he was planning something, so he did his best to help Prince Jing distract the sixth prince!

Li Yu had spotted a thick cotton blanket on the ground, so he jumped in that direction and tried to protect his stomach. His original plan was to land on the blanket after he slapped the sixth prince. Since Prince Jing had a hidden weapon, he would definitely take advantage of this opportunity, and Li Yu could jump into the corner during the chaos and take out some of the water in his inventory.

Luckily, he’d had a crystal bottle and a fish tank in his inventory this time, both filled with clean water. The crystal bottle was shattered now, but he could still bring the fish tank out. He would be safe if he stayed in there.

As Li Yu expected, he and Prince Jing both had the same idea, so Prince Jing didn’t waste the opportunity that he’d worked so hard to create. Not only did he restrain the sixth prince with his dagger, he even caught the

fish. Li Yu was so happy that he wrapped his tail tightly around Prince Jing's finger.

Though it was a critical moment, Prince Jing still took the time to gently stroke the fish's head with his thumb.

Prince Jing had blocked him from view with his body and sleeve, so Li Yu quickly took the fish tank out of his inventory and jumped in. Li Yu's heart was pounding. His husband was fine and their daughter was unharmed! Sob sob sob, he did it!

"Prince Jing, what are you trying to do?!" shouted the panic-stricken sixth prince.

Prince Jing's cold gaze traveled past the sixth prince to land steadily on Consort Zhang. "Let go of Royal Father," he said in a deep voice.

The sixth prince was Consort Zhang's son. If Consort Zhang could hold the emperor hostage, then Prince Jing could hold the sixth prince hostage to negotiate with her.

The sixth prince froze at the sound of Prince Jing's hoarse voice. He glanced at him, trembling. Wasn't Prince Jing born mute? How come he could speak?

Everyone else turned pale with shock too. So, Prince Jing's muteness could be cured!

Qianqing Palace was full of Consort Zhang's people. The other concubines were being held hostage by her as well, so they were quite happy for Prince Jing to save the emperor. They all quietly hoped that Prince Jing could succeed.

The eighth prince's gaze was bright. He was still a child, so he was paying attention to something different from everyone else. While Prince

Jing restrained the sixth prince, what the eighth prince saw was Prince Jing hiding a fish tank behind his sleeve. He didn't know where the fish tank had come from, but the fish that had just slapped the sixth prince must have fallen into the tank.

If Fifth Royal Brother was going to fight Sixth Royal Brother, what about the fish?

The eighth prince really wanted to help Prince Jing, so despite Concubine Lu's repeated protests, he snuck over, picked up the fish tank, and ran back. He was short, and he was just a child, so nobody stopped him!

The eighth prince hugged the fish tank and wouldn't let go. Prince Jing started to see this younger brother of his in a new light.

With nothing left to worry about, Prince Jing turned back to Consort Zhang and said, "Let Royal Father go." The dagger pressed deeper into the sixth prince's throat, and a thin line of bright red blood started to bead on his skin.

The sixth prince began to scream in pain. "Mother, save me!"

The sixth prince was afraid Prince Jing would actually kill him and he hoped that Consort Zhang would come to his aid. But her expression remained dark, and she stayed silent.

The sixth prince started to become uneasy.

He had been taken out of prison suddenly and told that his mother, Consort Zhang, had gained power. Mu Tianxiao didn't believe it at first, but when he saw her sitting beside the emperor despite the emperor's obvious disgust, he had to believe it.

This mother of his was no longer the disdained, useless, submissive woman he remembered. He didn't know when she had changed so much.

But he welcomed this change. Since he was her son and she controlled the emperor, she would definitely help him take the throne. He just had to sit back and reap the benefits.

But there was one thing he didn't understand. Why had she kept this hidden, and why didn't she help him when he was conspiring to seize the throne?

Or had this been her plan all along? Considering that Prince Jing had defeated him and how much the emperor favored Prince Jing, the sixth prince's own plan never would have succeeded. It was only after he survived defeat, when the emperor and Prince Jing thought he was powerless and had lost completely, that Consort Zhang could take action and defeat them in one fell swoop.

When he thought about it carefully, because she always pretended to be ignorant in front of him, he'd never suspected it at all. In truth, all the useful people around him had come from Consort Zhang, so it wasn't that she hadn't helped him, just that to win the war, she had to hide what she was doing from even him.

These were all the reasons Mu Tianxiao could think of to convince himself to accept the current Consort Zhang.

Even though he'd spent all this time trying to work her out, she never explained anything to him. Mu Tianxiao was a bit scared of this mother of his, who could even deceive the emperor, and he didn't dare ask too many questions. As long as he could be free and ascend to the throne, he decided, everything was fine.

But right now, Prince Jing was using him as a hostage to threaten Consort Zhang. When she didn't respond for a long time, he started to panic. Though he still called Consort Zhang "Mother," he wasn't able to predict her at all.

"Your Highness Prince Jing." Consort Zhang, who'd been silent the whole time, suddenly chuckled. "Why do you think I would make this exchange with you? You only have a prince in your hands, while I have the ruler of an empire."

Consort Zhang clapped lightly, and an archer hidden in the main hall of Qianqing Palace immediately let loose an arrow.

In a flash, the sixth prince was struck by that arrow. He was completely unprepared. Blood burst forth from his chest as his eyes widened, staring at his wound. This was a secret arrow, fired at his own mother's command.

"Mother, you…you…" He called out to her with difficulty, then toppled over, face-first.

Nobody had expected Consort Zhang to kill her own son. Everyone watching sensed the danger present and shuddered in fear.

The emperor couldn't believe it. "Not even tigers harm their own children! Why did you kill Tianxiao?!"

Even though the sixth prince had made an attempt on his life, the emperor had never wanted to kill him. But Consort Zhang had easily removed him from the equation so she wouldn't be burdened with him anymore. The emperor knew he couldn't compare to her coldhearted viciousness.

“‘Not even tigers harm their own children’?” Consort Zhang laughed. “That was just a single life. When you destroyed Loulan, hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives. Surely that makes you a lot worse than a tiger?”

The emperor looked back at her with a fierce glare.

Prince Jing frowned slightly. “You’re from Loulan—Consort Mei?”

“That’s right.” Consort Zhang admitted it easily. She had been hiding for almost half her life, but there was no need for her to hide anymore.

She reached up and wiped her hand across her face, pulling off a thin layer of skin.

Consort Zhang had started as a maidservant, with a slightly darker complexion and features that made her look honest and sincere. But when she took off the layer of skin, her skin was pale and her appearance exquisite, completely different from the way she’d looked as Consort Zhang.

“I am Consort Mei,” she said. “But I’ve never liked that title. I am the daughter of the ruler of Loulan. You can call me Princess Langya.”

Li Yu had hypothesized with Prince Jing that whoever poisoned Prince Jing when he was born, and kept trying to assassinate him, might be related to Loulan or Consort Mei.

But as it turned out, the supposedly dead Consort Mei wasn’t dead at all. She was the one in charge of the poisoning and assassination attempts. She had been hiding in the palace all these years as the sixth prince’s mother, in a guise almost as transparent as glass.

Her entire life must have been leading up to this moment—the moment she could exact her revenge on the emperor.

Then, how did Consort Mei—Princess Langya—turn into Consort Zhang?

Chapter 132:
A Fish Delivery

WHEN THEY LEARNED that the Consort Zhang in front of them was an impostor, the concubines started whispering among themselves: *Consort Zhang is usually such a quail, no wonder she was able to kill the sixth prince when it really came down to it.* Her actions had seriously exceeded their expectations of her, but the "her" they knew had never existed. If she could do that to the sixth prince, what might she do to them?

Now only one step away from victory, Princess Langya was in a good mood. "Are you all thinking that I found an opportunity to impersonate Consort Zhang and then restrained the emperor?" she said, curling her lips into a smile.

The concubines didn't dare nod, but it was what they'd all been thinking. The emperor and Prince Jing had come to this conclusion as well.

"Actually, Consort Zhang has been dead for a long time," she said gleefully. "Back then, I had only been in the harem for three days. I had no desire to live—all I wanted was to assassinate the emperor. When the emperor found out, he sentenced me to death. Empress Xiaohui ordered a servant to bring me poisonous wine, and that servant was Lady Zhang, a servant in Changchun Palace.

"But this despicable Lady Zhang, who looked timid and afraid, was actually a coward who only dared to bully the weak. In my time of difficulty, she wanted to steal my jewelry. That was my last bit of dignity and I couldn't let it go, so I used a bracelet as bait to take her life. I could have just put everything behind me and left the palace to go wherever I

desired—as someone who had nearly died, I should have been indifferent to worldly affairs, after all. But I just couldn't come to terms with it."

Princess Langya loudly recounted all the grudges she held over the years, and the blood on her hands made her tremble with excitement. "Why was the person who made me suffer so much allowed to sit at the top of the world without worry? Why was I, the daughter of a ruler, forced to smile and give birth to my enemy's children?"

"I didn't want to bend my knees and submit. You destroyed Loulan and took everything I had, so why couldn't I take over your empire?" Princess Langya glanced at the emperor and smiled with disdain. "Your Majesty, what goes around comes around; turnabout is fair play.

"Lady Zhang died by my hands and nobody knew, so I decided to replace her. I once had a confidant who was excellent at disguise, and I learned the art while I was in Loulan. I disguised myself as Lady Zhang and stayed by Empress Xiaohui's side. She never realized the truth—what a stupid woman!"

Princess Langya smiled meaningfully. Her skill at disguising herself was the key to her replacing Lady Zhang, and it was something Li Yu had never considered before. Such advanced disguise techniques really were possible in this world, apparently.

The emperor now realized that Lady Zhang had been replaced a long time ago, and he was so furious his chest hurt. "So were you the one who poisoned Xiaohui's children?" he demanded.

The emperor had ordered Luo Ruisheng to investigate the deaths of eldest prince and fourth prince, but he had lost contact with Luo Ruisheng some time ago. With the emperor in "Consort Zhang's" clutches, it was safe

to assume that Head Eunuch Luo had probably also been trapped somewhere.

Princess Langya had impersonated Lady Zhang with ulterior motives for decades now, and the emperor had already come to suspect that there was more to the deaths of the eldest and fourth princes. In that moment, blood rushed to his head, and he blurted those thoughts out.

Princess Langya chuckled coldly. “The eldest prince’s short life had nothing to do with me. But his death let me think of a good way to torture you. The fourth prince and Prince Jing were indeed my doing. Pu Liu and Lady Zhang both worked in Changchun Palace, and she trusted Lady Zhang more than others. As a prince’s wet nurse, she had to take health-boosting medicine every day per the imperial physicians’ orders. I had seen the prescription before and knew that it contained female ginseng, so I snuck in a secret ingredient from Loulan into her tea.”

Li Yu, hidden in the fish tank and eavesdropping in plain sight, flapped his fins when he heard the words “secret ingredient from Loulan.” Loulan had snowy mountains, so the secret ingredient must be xuewuzi. Did this mean the fourth prince had died because of xuewuzi?

“The secret ingredient was originally meant to nourish, but it becomes poison when it’s mixed with female ginseng,” Princess Langya continued. “A prince wouldn’t just have one wet nurse—they rotate. I was on good terms with Pu Liu and knew her shifts, so I would give her the poison when she was on duty and the antidote when she was off duty. The poison the secret ingredient creates isn’t immediately dangerous, so Pu Liu was fine, but the fourth prince… The poison was not as powerful since it was transmitted through milk, so the fourth prince lived for quite a long

time. Everyone said his health was weak, but I was the only one who knew that he died from poison."

Princess Langya looked at the emperor in delight. "I felt the joy of revenge when I watched you suffer from the pain of losing your son. Empress Xiaohui felt regretful, so I convinced her to have another child so that I could torment you again. I thought it was too troublesome to administer poison through Pu Liu all the time—but Empress Xiaohui's nourishing tea contained female ginger too, so I tried to do the same with her and kill the child in the womb. Unfortunately, the child was tenacious."

She glanced at Prince Jing—he was clearly the child she was talking about.

"Originally, I was going to bribe the imperial physician and midwife to kill the child after he was born, but it turned out that he was born mute because of the poison. The emperor and Empress Xiaohui had been looking forward to a di son, so a mute di son would only make them suffer more. I decided to keep him alive for longer and slowly 'weaken' him until he died, just like I did with the fourth prince. But then Pu Liu discovered what I was doing, so I told her that she was also responsible for the fourth prince's death, which meant she had unknowingly become my accomplice. I used her family to threaten her and forced her to take the medicine on her own, poisoning the fifth prince's milk.

"But her conscience won over. When I wasn't paying attention, she made a mistake on purpose to alert the emperor and Empress Xiaohui. She was cast out of the palace in the end and died of the poison, while her family died tragically as well. That's what happens to someone who doesn't pick a side… The fifth prince was then moved out of Changchun Palace and appointed a new wet nurse, so I couldn't meddle anymore."

Princess Langya's account chilled everyone present to the core. Prince Jing's muteness was her doing, and Pu Liu, who Li Yu had originally thought was the culprit, was actually just a woman who'd led a difficult life. No wonder she tried to leave clues in the cloth tiger she'd made for Prince Jing. She must have hoped Prince Jing would be able to find it in the future and rid himself of the poison.

Now that Li Yu knew the truth, he was heartbroken. Prince Jing's muteness had saved his life—how evil did one have to be to commit such a crime? Li Yu wished he wasn't so far away from Princess Langya; he'd slapped the sixth prince already, but he couldn't slap this crazy, awful princess.

Princess Langya had committed too many crimes to count, but she continued to list them with a smile on her face. "The fifth prince was 'born' mute and Empress Xiaohui was overwhelmed by anguish, so I helped her out so she wouldn't be in too much pain."

"You—" The emperor felt like his heart was being chopped to pieces. He couldn't bear the pain. "I can't believe Xiaohui was your doing too!"

"So what?" Princess Langya lifted her chin arrogantly. "After what happened to Empress Xiaohui, I thought of a new way to enact my revenge. Taking away your wife and children was nothing. I could only soothe the rage in my heart by taking away your empire! When you entered Changchun Palace to mourn Empress Xiaohui, I drugged your wine so you would mistakenly believe that you had taken me to bed. After that, I became a concubine again, so it was only natural for me to have a child.

"I found a child who had royal Loulan blood and set him up as the sixth prince. As long as he ascended to the throne, this world would become

Loulan's. I was afraid of one flaw in my plan at first, but because you had no feelings toward Lady Zhang, you only sat briefly when you came to Yongfu Palace and never discovered my secret.

"All these years, I played the role of Lady Zhang, and even Mu Tianxiao, my son only by name, had no idea. But he was so useless that he couldn't even win against a mute. When Prince Jing caught him, I abandoned him."

Princess Langya looked at the emperor. "With the power I wield now, I could make you give me the throne! There's nothing stopping me!"

Li Yu, who was listening, felt like he was waking up from a dream. Holy shit! They all thought the princess wanted to put the sixth prince on the throne, but it turned out she wanted to be empress herself!

And the sixth prince wasn't the emperor's son at all, just an expendable puppet?!

Villains always talked too much. There was no need for Princess Langya to lie anymore, so she was probably speaking the truth.

The emperor was too overwhelmed by grief and rage to react to Princess Langya's threat. But she didn't care what he was feeling. After saying her piece she looked down on everyone in the palace, and her gaze landed on Prince Jing.

She smiled at him. "I didn't expect that you'd be able to cure your muteness, so you probably found out about the xuewuzi, but you were still too late. I was one step faster and have control over the emperor. You were always a fish that slipped out of my net, but even though I wasn't able to take your life, I've still won. Now that you have no more moves to force my hand, what can you do to me?"

After a moment’s thought, Prince Jing gazed at the fish tank the eighth prince was protecting with his body, then let go of the dagger and let it fall to the ground.

Li Yu knew that Prince Jing was looking at him.

Prince Jing’s original plan had been to use the sixth prince as a hostage and make an exchange with Consort Zhang. At the time it had been the best plan—he could never have anticipated that Consort Zhang was actually Princess Langya in disguise and that she didn’t care for the sixth prince at all.

The sixth prince was no longer the winning bargaining chip. When Prince Jing captured him, Princess Langya sent the sixth prince to the underworld. The sixth prince went to his death without ever realizing that even though he had used so many other people throughout his life, he was the one being used the most. How laughable, how pitiful. He’d tried to frame the eighth prince and Dabao for not being of royal blood, never knowing that he was actually the one whose origins were unknown.

Princess Langya wanted nothing but to overthrow the emperor. She accused the emperor of murdering others, but she herself had harmed countless innocents. Empress Xiaohui, the fourth prince, Pu Liu, Prince Jing, and even the sixth prince… She had every reason to hate the emperor, but she had sacrificed everyone else around her for her revenge as well. Her words were pretty, but it was all just for her own selfish reasons.

Prince Jing had lost his bargaining chip, so his original plan was thwarted. He surrendered because he was afraid Li Yu would be dragged into this.

The look he gave Li Yu carried a thousand words, and Li Yu understood it all.

Princess Langya ordered people to take Prince Jing and the emperor away. The eighth prince brought the fish tank over on his own and stood with Prince Jing.

“I’ll give you one more day to think things through,” Princess Langya urged the emperor fiercely. “If you understand the position you’re in, abdicate quickly, or I’ll find someone else to take your place.”

The emperor’s heart was gripped by ice.

Prince Jing shook his head lightly at the emperor. Though Princess Langya was skilled in the art of disguise, it wasn’t easy to impersonate the emperor. She couldn’t fake having royal blood; if Prince Li and the rest of the royal family questioned her, Princess Langya’s puppet would be exposed immediately. That was why she kept urging the emperor to abdicate instead.

No matter how ridiculous it was to abdicate the throne to an unfamiliar woman, it would become legitimate if the emperor was the one who decreed it. This was the only way for Princess Langya to officially gain the throne. If the emperor did as she said, the only thing awaiting him was death.

If Princess Langya changed her mind and instead decided to put one of the two younger princes on the throne, that would also go poorly for the emperor. But she hated the emperor and his bloodline, so it was an unlikely move. Though they were imprisoned, they were still safe for now.

The emperor knew all of this.

“Tianchi, I was too careless,” he said dejectedly, once they were separated from the concubines and taken to the side hall with guards stationed outside. “When Li Yu asked me if there were foreigners in the harem, I thought of Consort Mei. She was the only foreign consort I have ever had. At the time, I wanted to look for clues in Luoxia Palace, where she once lived, but I ran into Lady Zhang on the way. I was careless and she ended up gaining control of me, but I never would have imagined she was really Consort Mei… She pretended to be me and summoned you to the palace so she could capture everyone in one fell swoop. In the end, it was my fault.”

The emperor’s expression was miserable. After learning the truth behind the deaths of Empress Xiaohui and the fourth prince, as well as the reason behind Prince Jing’s poisoning, he sincerely regretted not destroying all of Loulan in one go.

The two countries were already hostile with each other. The ruler of Loulan had vowed to attack the capital in the past and the emperor had been young and fiery at the time, so how could he let Chang’an-jun run his mouth? If the two countries battled it out and he was defeated fair and square on the battlefield, he’d have nothing to say even if he lost his life.

In the end, Chang’an-jun lost, and when he arrived at the capital to present his daughter, the emperor really thought that was the end of everything. But instead, Princess Langya’s arrival would mark the start of true evil.

At first, he wasn’t very interested in Princess Langya, but he gave her the title of consort to appease the Loulan people. He wanted to treat her like the other concubines once she joined the harem, but since all she wanted was to assassinate him he knew he couldn’t keep her around anymore. He

sentenced her to death without any hesitation. But he didn't investigate how much power she had left.

He'd underestimated the enemy, and the enemy was more cunning than he thought.

As the emperor regretted his past mistakes, Prince Jing patted him on the shoulder. "Don't despair, Royal Father. We're not at the end of our rope yet," he said swiftly. "I would like to be bold and ask Royal Father to draw up a rescue edict."

The emperor was a man who'd been through turbulent times, so he quickly steadied his emotions. Of course he understood what Prince Jing meant by the rescue edict—it wasn't hard for him to write that edict, but it had to be given to someone who he had absolute trust in. This edict would be used to summon the troops guarding the capital to attack the palace and rescue the emperor. If it fell into the hands of someone who had other intentions, the results would be disastrous.

"Tianchi, are you…confident?" the emperor asked.

"Yes," Prince Jing said firmly.

The emperor stared at his son for a long time. While he was in the depths of despair and thought he could never turn the situation around, Prince Jing remained calm. The emperor couldn't help but believe Prince Jing; he was, after all, the only one who could save him.

"All right. I believe you," the emperor said.

The emperor took out a jade box from his sleeve. The box was as long as a finger and completely empty—that was probably why it was still with the emperor.

The emperor threw the box onto the ground, shattering it.

Among the broken pieces, a piece of iron peeked through. It must have been embedded in the jade. The iron plate was engraved with the image of a ferocious tiger.

This was…

Prince Jing was stunned.

“This is my tiger talisman. It can be matched with the tiger talisman in the general’s possession to mobilize the troops. This was hidden cleverly—I found it quite amusing that Princess Langya couldn’t find it even after she had her guards search me.” The emperor smiled and gave Prince Jing the talisman. “This talisman grants the holder the power to do anything to save the emperor.”

Prince Jing nodded, accepting it seriously.

“Qianqing Palace is under that woman’s control and heavily guarded. How are you going to get it out of here?” the emperor asked curiously.

Prince Jing’s gaze fell on the fish tank not far away; he walked toward it with the tiger talisman in hand. Li Yu had already sensed him and was anxiously waiting with his head raised.

“Xiaoyu…” Prince Jing knelt.

Li Yu blew a bubble in the direction of the talisman. He knew only he could slip out of the palace without anyone noticing and take the talisman to find help.

Hand it over, it’ll be fine! Li Yu waved his tail determinedly, ready for battle.

That was indeed Prince Jing’s plan, but he didn’t immediately hand over the talisman. Instead, he put a finger into the water, and gently touched

the fish's back. Li Yu felt so good, his tail was shaking. Just being pet on his back wasn't enough. He turned over so his belly was facing up, asking the prince to rub his stomach.

Xiaomian'ao was inside, even though you couldn't feel anything yet, he he he!

Prince Jing stopped, then caressed the fish's stomach, unwilling to let him leave.

Li Yu knew that Prince Jing was having a difficult time, so he quickly wrapped his tail around his fingers and used his mouth to push at the tiger talisman. *Everything will be fine!*

Prince Jing finally nodded, found a piece of satin, and tied the talisman to the fish.

"Tianchi, are you going to have this fish take it?" The emperor was stunned.

Having a fish take the talisman was a bit too…

"Royal Father, trusting him is the same thing as trusting me," Prince Jing said.

His expression was very stern. The emperor could see that he wasn't joking. It was true that Prince Jing's fish was quite intelligent—he'd seen it slap the sixth prince's face earlier… The Imperial Astrological Bureau and Liao Kong had both praised this fish in the past too, so he must be a sign of good fortune.

The emperor thus convinced himself and accepted Prince Jing's plan.

There was a pool in Qianqing Palace's side hall that was connected to the outside. There was no way for a human to use it, but a fish could.

Prince Jing picked Li Yu up and put him gently in the water. When Li Yu entered the water, he blew a kiss at Prince Jing, flicked his tail, and quickly swam away.

When he left their line of sight, he put the talisman into his inventory.

Fishy Delivery would definitely ship such a priceless item with care!

Chapter 133:
Fish Saving Husband

LI YU SWAM as quickly as he could into deeper waters, only approaching the surface occasionally to see where he was.

It was very safe in the water. There were waves of guards patrolling the area, but none of them noticed the fish with a hidden talisman passing by in the rivers and ponds.

Li Yu had canceled his transformation skill and turned back into a fish to warn Prince Jing, but he'd ended up accidentally encountering the sixth prince and being taken to Qianqing Palace. Now that he was transporting the talisman, though, his hope to be useful was fulfilled.

The best-case scenario would be if he could swim right out of the palace. If he couldn't…

Well, he simply had to, even if he had to create the opportunity himself! Prince Jing, the emperor, and everyone in Qianqing Palace were counting on him. Since he had the talisman, he had to succeed!

Li Yu kept swimming. After a long time traversing numerous different waterways, he finally swam into a small river. The only thing separating him from the palace gates was a wall.

He'd been lucky enough so far that no one had spotted him, but right then, he ran into a group of guards that had just gone off duty. With nothing else to do, they stared at the little river while they chatted and laughed.

Li Yu slowed down.

This was the only way out of the palace. Was he supposed to swim through it right in front of the guards? He wouldn't have had to worry if he were still a little black fish, but he was now a silver koi with gold specks. His coloring stood out even underwater.

Especially if he had to swim directly in front of some guards… For some reason, the guards were all staring right at the water. If he was found out now, his efforts would have all been for nothing.

Just to be safe, Li Yu found some aquatic plants to hide behind for a moment. He wanted to wait until the guards left, but he waited for a while and the guards still didn't seem to have any intention of leaving.

Li Yu was a little anxious. Suddenly, he heard a low meow and saw a white cat running toward him.

He was startled. Had he been discovered by this cat?

He was covered with hard scales now and wasn't afraid of cats, but he couldn't afford to get into a scuffle at the moment. Just as he was about to hide even deeper in the water, though, the white cat suddenly switched directions and ran straight toward the guards.

"Meow!!" the white cat wailed, attracting the guards' attention.

Both Li Yu and the guards were extremely startled.

The white cat rushed into the group, ramming forcefully into one of the guard's legs, and scratching him at the same time. While the guard was yelling in pain, the cat picked up his money pouch in its mouth. The guard who'd been hit, scratched, and stolen from immediately yelled some more and started chasing the troublesome cat.

The other guards started laughing. They couldn't just ignore their colleague who'd been bullied out of nowhere by a random cat, so they

rushed to help, leaving their spot next to the river.

Was it safe now?

Li Yu patiently waited for a bit longer, and after making sure there was no one left, swam past.

Before he left the palace, he glanced in the direction where the cat had run.

It was a white cat, but it had been so dirty that it was nearly gray. Its physique wasn't as strong as it was when it was Master Cat either, but its eyes still shone like gems.

…*Thank you, Piaoxue,* Li Yu thought to himself.

He finally understood why "Share the Country" had updated after he helped Piaoxue. He had thought Piaoxue wasn't even worth a dime to the main mission, but reality proved that Piaoxue was worth at least a pouch of money.

Animals weren't human, but they still knew to repay kindness.

Li Yu shot out of the palace like an arrow.

The next step was to go to the House of Cheng'en. The children and Wang Xi were there, and the Cheng'en family was trustworthy. As long as he gave them the talisman and let them know what happened in the palace, they would definitely go to the defending army and lead them into the palace to save the emperor!

Li Yu had been to the House of Cheng'en several times already and was familiar with the way there, but this was his first time traveling there by water.

The river that came from the palace didn’t go to the House of Cheng’en. There was another river near the House of Cheng’en, but the two rivers didn’t meet, and as Li Yu kept swimming, he was getting farther and farther from his destination.

It looked like he had to change his plan.

Li Yu jumped to shore and bounced a couple of times. His tail could help him slide on the ground for a bit, but it was too slow—he’d suffocate before he got to the other river!

If he was in human form, he could have just run over. But he had canceled his skill earlier and he wouldn’t be able to use it for the rest of the day…

The tiger talisman was too important for him to give up now, so without further ado, Li Yu tapped the scale that turned him into a manmer.

He rarely ever used this skill. The manmer form needed water to breathe, and his face was too ugly in this form, so manmer play was not nearly as fun as merman play. But this form granted him the human legs he needed to run fast, so right now, he had no other choice.

Li Yu took out a piece of clothing from his inventory, wrapped it around his upper body, and before he ran out of breath, sprinted as fast as he could.

It was getting darker, and Li Yu accidentally bumped into a couple of people on the road because he couldn’t see clearly.

I’m really sorry! Li Yu couldn’t speak and had to just wave with his short, wide fins.

A passerby who accidentally caught a glimpse of half a fish face was stunned. *What’s going on? Did I just see a fish…? The fish ran over there…*

The fish…has legs? For running?!

Li Yu soon arrived at the other river. He plunged in right away, turned back into a fish, and continued onward.

Finally, he reached the manor. The current flowed into the manor, and he followed along without hesitation. The lights were on inside, and Li Yu swam around anxiously in a lotus pond.

He didn't know where Ye Qinghuan and the former Duke of Cheng'en were. But suddenly he heard barking, and his eyes lit up.

It's Xiongfeng! There was still hope.

Xiongfeng soon ran over, his tail wagging, with a child's toy ball in his mouth. He stopped and sniffed the air fervently, then bounded over to the lotus pond where Li Yu was.

"Xiongfeng!" Li Yu jumped to the edge of the pond and flapped his tail, hoping Xiongfeng would hear it.

Xiongfeng barked excitedly. He rushed over and circled around Li Yu once, then poked him with the tip of his nose to make sure that it was his old friend the fish.

"Quick, go find your master!" Li Yu said.

Xiongfeng couldn't understand Fish, so he ran around the fish again and barked. Luckily, his barks were so loud that Ye Qinghuan heard them from nearby. Ye Qinghuan thought his beloved pet seemed a bit too excited, so he came over to take a look.

From a distance, he could see that the ball was on the ground and Xiongfeng was pacing around the lotus pond, barking. Ye Qinghuan didn't

think anything was amiss, and he leaned over to pick up his precious daughter's toy ball before leaving.

Li Yu obviously couldn't let Ye Qinghuan leave. He had already used his human form and manmer form, so now, he turned into a mermaid and shouted, "Ye Qinghuan!!"

Ye Qinghuan was startled by the sudden sound. When he turned around, he saw someone in the lotus pond.

Most of Li Yu's body was underwater. He hurriedly put on some clothes and shoved his tail deeper into the pond.

Ye Qinghuan walked over, hesitant. "Li-gongzi…cousin-in-law?"

Li Yu wiped the water from his face and quickly nodded his head. "Yes, it's me."

"Why are you here… Where's Tianchi?"

Wang Xi had said Prince Jing and his consort had entered the palace but that he hadn't heard from them. They were just starting to worry when Prince Jing's consort appeared in the lotus pond. It was unbelievable.

"Ye Qinghuan, I know you're probably thinking this is weird, but that's not important right now." Li Yu took a deep breath, retrieved the tiger talisman from his inventory, and placed it on his palm. "I have a very, very important task to entrust to you."

The fishy delivery had finally reached its destination!

Li Yu told Ye Qinghuan what had happened, and Ye Qinghuan's grip around the talisman tightened.

"Don't worry, I'll go find Grandpa and the others right away," he said. "We won't let them down. We'll rescue the emperor and everyone else

as soon as possible.”

Li Yu nodded. Ye Qinghuan took a couple of steps, but then he turned around to look at him again, confused. “Are…you all right in the water?” Ye Qinghuan was quite astute at times, and he noticed that Li Yu somehow seemed to be different from usual.

But the situation in the palace was dire, and there was no time to wonder about such things. Li Yu urged him to leave. “I’m great, everything’s fine. Go save His Highness!”

Ye-shizi understood, but before he left, Li Yu suddenly asked, “Could you help me with something? Can you ask others to not come near this area?”

Ye Qinghuan looked at Li Yu, puzzled. He was pretty sure Li Yu was hiding some kind of secret in the lotus pond… But so what if he had a secret? Li Yu was Prince Jing’s consort and his friend, so he would protect him.

“I won’t let other people come near. I promise.” Ye Qinghuan straightened his back and added brightly, “But I’ll bring the children over. You must miss them.”

“All right…” Li Yu did miss the children a lot. The Cheng’en Manor was very safe, and after Ye Qinghuan left, Li Yu visibly relaxed.

He had originally planned to just take a short nap in the lotus pond as he waited for the children. It’d almost been a full day by now, and he was looking forward to the moment he could turn back into a human. But after a short while, he fell asleep. After all, he was a pregnant fish. Though his daughter was well-protected by his fish body, he was still prone to exhaustion.

When he woke up, Li Yu found that there were four new little “mountains” in front of him.

The children’s butts were facing him in a row, the leftmost one straight and the rightmost one crooked.

What are they doing? Fish Father was curious.

The children couldn’t keep quiet for long. After a short while, Li Yu heard them discussing something quietly.

Erbao and Sanbao were very worried. “Daddy still isn’t waking up.”

Sibao shook his head. “Daddy’s still asleep.”

Dabao quickly shushed them. “Shut up, be quiet. Take care of Dad.”

Fish Daddy felt a little emotional that his children were taking care of him. They were working hard on his behalf.

As it’d been a full day already, he could use the human transformation skill again. Li Yu quickly turned into a human and coughed heavily. The fish children heard him and all turned around, calling out “Dad!” in surprise.

Li Yu walked to shore and hugged the children. Who cared about “sharing a country”? With such cute children, he would definitely protect their family!

They mustn’t delay, they had a husband to save!

Chapter 134:
Fish Riding Donkey

LI YU HAD transformed in the water so many times that his clothes were soaked.

After he climbed out of the lotus pond, he brought the children to the nearest veranda and found Xiongfeng standing guard there. When Xiongfeng saw Li Yu coming, he wagged his tail happily.

Xiongfeng led the way to a room nearby. There were plenty of clean clothes there and nobody else around. Li Yu knew that Ye Qinghuan must have prepared this for him. Feeling incredibly thankful, he quickly changed into clean clothes.

There were two doors into the room. Li Yu exited the room using the other door, and a servant soon came by to take him to see the former Duke of Cheng'en.

Ye Qian had already invited Prince Li. At first, Prince Li simply thought the former Duke of Cheng'en was overreacting and didn't want to enter the palace—but when he saw the tiger talisman in Ye Qinghuan's hands, he knew the situation was genuinely dire.

Prince Li turned the talisman over and over to check it.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

"The emperor broke a small jade box and took it out," Li Yu replied.

Prince Li had asked the question to ascertain where the talisman was hidden, in order to determine whether Li Yu could be trusted. It seemed Li Yu wasn't lying.

Prince Li asked Li Yu to tell him the details about the situation in Qianqing Palace. Li Yu did so, and when he mentioned Princess Langya, Prince Li had a lot more questions. A foreign princess had hidden in the harem for decades and even pretended to be someone else—of course he was shocked, and of course he wanted to know more. Li Yu understood; he told him everything he heard and saw.

"Since Princess Langya has Qianqing Palace on lockdown, how did you get out?" asked Prince Li. That was what he was most confused about. When it came to the emperor's safety, mistakes were not allowed.

Li Yu paused. How was he going to explain this?

"His Highness has been raising a fish," he said, after some thought. "He hid the talisman in the…the ornamental mountain in the fish tank, and found an opportunity to give me the tank. I was in Qianqiu Palace and wasn't with them, and Qianqiu Palace wasn't as heavily guarded as Qianqing Palace was. Perhaps they didn't think I was a threat? After I found the talisman, I snuck out of the palace to deliver it."

Li Yu's story was only barely acceptable, and it still had a lot of holes. Prince Li wanted to question him some more, but Ye Qinghuan hurried to help out. "He risked his life to bring the talisman to us, and he may not remember everything in all the panic and rush. What's the point of questioning him like this? It's more important to save the emperor, so let's plan things out."

Li Yu gave Ye Qinghuan a grateful look.

Prince Li could at least agree with this, so he immediately left with the Duke of Cheng'en to deliver the tiger talisman to the general in charge of defending the capital, so that he would mobilize the troops. Meanwhile,

Ye Qinghuan was in charge of gathering people in the manor who could support the troops. Ye Qian was getting on in years and couldn't move around as well as he once had, so he was to oversee operations from Cheng'en Manor.

Li Yu, of course, was going to take part in saving his husband, and once again entrusted the children to Wang Xi.

Dabao, wearing a little riding uniform, brought out his slingshot and staggered around on his short little legs until he could grab Li Yu's pants.

"Dabao save Grandpa," he said firmly.

Li Yu's eyes were a little damp. He picked his son up and rubbed his cheek against Dabao's.

"Good boy, Dabao," Li Yu gently comforted him. "Grandpa will be fine soon."

Li Yu sent Dabao back to Wang Xi again. The sight of Dabao's bulging little riding uniform made him recall something, though, and he went to find Ye Qinghuan.

"You want us all to wear thick armor, helmets, and shields?" Ye Qinghuan was surprised.

Attacking the palace was an urgent matter, and they might not be able to make it in time if they made those preparations. What's more, only the defending troops had armor, not the guards of the manor.

"There's a kind of liquid that will burst out from the allies of Princess Langya," Li Yu explained, gesturing. "If you touch it, it…" He didn't know how to explain what corrosion was in ancient times, so he said, "If you touch it, it will make your flesh fester and die. It's very powerful. I've seen it with my own eyes, so you must be careful."

…So that was why. Ye Qinghuan had been educated by his father since he was a child—though he wasn't afraid of death, it was still good to take precautions. He ordered someone to pass the news to the troops. The manor guards all carried shields and would wear armor if they had it. If not, they would put on thick cotton jackets instead, and exposed areas would be wrapped in thick bandages. When they ran into enemies, they were to try to kill them with arrows.

Ye Qinghuan had gold silk armor, and so did the former Duke of Cheng'en. Before they left, they brought it to Li Yu, and he thanked them profusely. After they'd donned their armor, everything was ready.

Ye Qinghuan hugged his carefree daughter in her cradle one last time. He looked back to see the Princess of Jinjue gazing at him with reddened eyes. Ye Qinghuan thought she might stop him, but although she was choking up, she said, "Be careful, and come back soon."

Ye Qinghuan's chest warmed, and he nodded forcefully. The princess was so understanding that he swallowed all the consolations he had thought of. "Don't worry. I'll be back soon."

Ye Qinghuan truly believed this.

Prince Li, the Duke of Cheng'en, and General Huwei rushed to the palace, leading the defense forces.

When they arrived at the palace gates, General Huwei pulled out the two pieces of the tiger talisman, each fitting perfectly with the other. The authority of the talisman was the authority of the emperor, so the guards at the gate all knelt in greeting. If anyone did anything other than kneel, General Huwei ordered them killed on the spot.

It had taken Princess Langya over a decade to grow Loulan's power in the palace, as her identity had to remain secret. As a result, her forces were strong but few. They had only been able to capture Qianqing Palace because of the element of surprise and the false imperial edicts she dispatched. The rest of the guards in the palace were still loyal to the emperor, so as soon as they saw the talisman, they stopped resisting. The defenders entered the palace smoothly, unhindered.

Li Yu wasn't very good at riding a horse yet, so Ye Qinghuan had found a short little donkey for him to ride, and even arranged for guards to protect him on either side.

Li Yu cracked his little whip. He felt like the safest fish in the world.

When the rebels attacked, Ye Qinghuan led the House of Cheng'en's guards to handle them. A few soldiers who had defected to the enemy surrounded Ye Qinghuan.

Ye Qinghuan was just as skilled in the art of battle as Prince Jing. He blocked attacks with his sword and counterattacked, injuring one. The soldier pretended to be defeated, but then he suddenly stabbed himself with his sword and rushed toward Ye Qinghuan.

Li Yu had seen these actions before. "Watch out!" he yelled.

Ye Qinghuan lifted his shield to protect his body, blocking the corrosive liquid that sprayed out. The liquid couldn't penetrate the thick shield, and Ye Qinghuan was unharmed.

The guards followed suit and used their shields to block any liquid they ran into. Even though the liquid still splashed onto some of the guards by accident, they immediately changed out of their thick clothing so they

weren’t hurt by it. When he ran into people from Loulan, Ye Qinghuan used bows and arrows instead so they couldn’t use their dirty tricks.

With the Loulan forces’ ultimate trick thwarted, the troops quickly arrived at Qianqing Palace.

Princess Langya hadn’t anticipated that reinforcements would come so quickly. When she’d asked the emperor earlier to abdicate the throne, he’d said he would think about it, but several hours later, she asked again, and he still said he needed time to think.

She really wanted to kill him, but she couldn’t. If the emperor died, the country would still belong to his son or grandsons. Princess Langya had spent decades meticulously planning this—how could she let something she’d worked this hard for fall into someone else’s hands?

Princess Langya’s expression darkened when she learned who was leading the defending forces.

She ordered her guards to bring the emperor, Prince Jing, and the two younger princes outside of Qianqing Palace. If she couldn’t obtain the country, then she would eradicate the emperor’s bloodline!

When Prince Li and the Duke of Cheng’en arrived, Princess Langya threatened them with the emperor’s life, screaming, “If you take one more step forward, I’ll kill the emperor! He won’t even leave an intact corpse!”

Prince Li, concerned for the emperor’s safety, stayed outside Qianqing Palace with the defending troops and didn’t dare enter. Archers from either side kept fighting, and more soldiers were killed. Princess Langya’s men were outnumbered by the soldiers, and they lost their archers one after another very quickly.

Seeing this, Princess Langya took out her sword and lunged toward the emperor, wanting to take him with her in death. But before she knew it, Prince Jing had moved in front of the emperor and deflected her sword with his dagger, placing it at her throat.

Princess Langya's lovely face turned pale. "W-weren't all your weapons taken?"

Prince Jing's sword had been taken before he entered the palace, and he had handed over the dagger in his boot—that was why Princess Langya felt it was safe to put Prince Jing and the emperor together. So where did he get this weapon?

Prince Jing smiled slightly. "I had a dagger for self-defense already, but my consort gave me another just before I came."

If he hadn't handed over his first weapon, Princess Langya wouldn't have let her guard down. How else would he get close to the emperor and get the tiger talisman? When he pretended to give up his dagger, he had already thought of a plan to defeat her.

Princess Langya laughed wildly. Ye Qinghuan, noticing that the emperor was no longer in danger, shot an arrow at her.

Prince Jing's dagger struck at the same time—Princess Langya was attacked from both directions. No matter which one she dodged, the other would strike her.

Princess Langya let out an eerie smile, then dodged the arrow and took Prince Jing's dagger.

"There's no more time to kill the emperor, there's no more time… then I'll kill Prince Jing, who should have died long ago…" she murmured. "Those of us from Loulan hide our most powerful 'skill' within our bodies.

Xuewuzi is nothing compared to that. The most powerful poison of Loulan is called ‘without a trace’…”

She smiled in despair and misery, and abruptly used the dagger to pierce the mechanism in her body, making several streams of liquid burst out.

“Tianchi—!” Li Yu yelled—he wanted to run over, but he was far away and densely surrounded by Ye Qinghuan’s people.

Princess Langya’s movements were fast, but Prince Jing was always on guard against her. When she held the dagger as if she was going to kill herself, he knew it was a trick and didn’t move to stop her. Instead, he kicked a table over and blocked all of the corrosive liquid that came out of her, deflecting the poison!

Princess Langya couldn’t believe that this trick, the pride of Loulan, had been rendered useless.

Prince Jing finished the job with his dagger.

Before she died, she glared at the emperor with a gaze full of hatred and spewed curses too quiet for anyone but herself to hear.

Soon after, she disappeared into the corrosive liquid.

The soldiers charged through Qianqing Palace and defeated the rest of the Loulan forces. A gaggle of imperial physicians rushed over to check the emperor’s pulse. Head Eunuch Luo, who had been imprisoned in a nearby palace for some time now, was rescued by the defenders and returned to the emperor, crying and laughing as he kowtowed.

Prince Jing moved against the crowd, looking for a familiar figure.

He’d taken just a quick glance earlier when he thought he saw Li Yu and heard his voice. But after he dealt with Princess Langya, the room filled with what seemed to be an ever-increasing amount of people. No matter how he looked, he couldn’t find Li Yu.

Prince Jing relentlessly continued to search.

Several guards noticed him and cleared a path for him. Prince Jing saw a donkey circling impatiently. On its back was a person—Li Yu.

“Tianchi, you’re here? Come help me, please. This donkey won’t stop.”

Li Yu had found that the donkey wouldn’t even stop when he cracked the whip…

Watching him scratching his head in confusion, Prince Jing couldn’t help but smile slightly. Xiaoyu didn’t know how to ride a horse, and it seemed he wasn’t good at riding a donkey either.

Chapter 135:
Fish Riding Husband

LI YU DIDN'T KNOW why the donkey wouldn't stop. After the hidden boss had been defeated, he wanted to fly into his husband's arms and cling to him like an octopus, but at such an important moment, the donkey let him down!

It felt like Ye Qinghuan had found him a donkey whose greatest passion was to pull a grinding mill—it wouldn't stop once it started!

Aaaahhh, let me off!

But he didn't dare try to jump down because his daughter was in his stomach. He was protected in fish form, but not as a human.

Prince Jing stared at his fish for a while, dazed, then walked over. The strange thing was that no matter how many times Li Yu yelled that he wanted to get off, the donkey ignored him and kept circling, but when Prince Jing arrived, for some reason, the donkey stopped immediately.

Perhaps the donkey could sense the tyrant male protagonist's aura.

Prince Jing held the reins and smiled. "Xiaoyu, are you tired?"

Ye Qinghuan was the tired one here—he'd spent this battle running around, bleeding and sweating. Li Yu hadn't even run on his own legs, so being tired didn't enter into the equation. He wanted to say, *I'm not tired at all*, but when he met Prince Jing's dark eyes with his own, his voice suddenly caught in his throat.

"I'm…all right."

Li Yu bit his lip, not knowing why he changed his answer. His husband was right in front of him! Sob sob, he wanted to hug him! But this donkey…

Though the donkey had stopped, he still couldn't quite clamber off.

Prince Jing's eyes were full of love. Xiaoyu said he was "all right," which meant he was tired, exhausted even. He wanted to put his fish in his sleeve, but there was little he could do in the palace. He smiled and stayed silent. Lifting his robes, he got up and sat behind Li Yu, hugging him from behind.

"Let's go home," he said.

Li Yu liked to call Prince Jing's manor "home," and under his influence, Prince Jing had started calling it home too.

His voice was hoarse, but it was better than it had been at the start. He was still recovering, after all; he couldn't be expected to sound like other people did. But it was precisely this sound that Li Yu couldn't handle. It traveled into his ears, making him go limp and numb. Prince Jing could speak, but he wasn't very talkative—because he had to keep his recovery a secret, and because he was used to being silent. Prince Jing rarely spoke of his own accord unless Li Yu made him practice. But after one night of bedtime activities, Prince Jing found that Xiaoyu was very sensitive to his voice, so perhaps intentionally, Prince Jing had started to whisper into Li Yu's ear in those specific moments.

To the fish, it felt like he was going to float into the air and become immortal!

Li Yu blushed. His husband's voice and the sensation at his hips made him squirm. He'd been hugged! His fish brain was instantly occupied

with dirty thoughts, and he cleared his throat. “I-Is it okay that you’re riding this with me?”

Princes usually rode horses; riding a donkey wasn’t nearly as dignified. Besides, Li Yu suspected that the donkey might not be able to support the two of them. But Prince Jing was too shameless to care about his dignity. He sat behind Li Yu, embraced him, and buried his face in Li Yu’s shoulder, breathing his scent in deeply. That was his answer.

How could Li Yu think about other things when his husband was acting this way? It wasn’t his fault if the donkey didn’t live up to expectations.

Li Yu cracked the whip with a shaking hand and the donkey started to move, trotting steadily forward with two people on its back.

Ye-shizi’s jaw almost dropped when he saw both of them sitting on the donkey’s back. He’d chosen a donkey for Li Yu based on his stature, since it was just right for him, but Prince Jing, a tall, strong man, was crammed behind Li Yu. It was much too…

The shizi thought the donkey had it hard, and also thought the two people hugging each other tightly were a little hard to look at.

Li Yu happily waved at him. “Ye Qinghuan, we’re going back!”

Ye Qinghuan came back to his senses. “You guys…” *Are going back, just like that?* “What about the children?”

Li Yu smacked his forehead. He’d really let the lust take over his brain; now that he was reunited with his husband, he almost forgot about his sons!

Li Yu, whose heart and body had been taken over by Prince Jing, was now completely focused on his four sons. He was about to turn around right

there and go back to Cheng'en Manor with Ye Qinghuan to pick them up when Prince Jing softly laughed.

"Tell Wang Xi to bring the children back," he said.

Ye-shizi was startled by the sudden sound. He looked around but didn't see anyone else. *Who was that, and why did they suddenly order me around?*

Li Yu understood Ye Qinghuan's confusion. Smiling, he pointed to the person behind him.

Ye-shizi realized something unbelievable. Prince Jing was the one speaking?! "Tianchi, you can talk now?" he said, surprised and overjoyed.

It had been the emperor's idea, so Prince Jing hadn't been able to reveal the fact that he could speak to anyone else. Only the emperor, Li Yu, and a few others knew. Not much time had passed since Prince Jing had gotten rid of the poison, and he hadn't found a good opportunity to let the House of Cheng'en know before Princess Langya showed up. But now that Loulan's power was destroyed, he didn't have to keep it hidden anymore, so he sat upright and nodded serenely.

At Cheng'en Manor, Li Yu had only said that Princess Langya had poisoned Prince Jing, which was why he couldn't speak when he was born. He didn't have time to tell them that Prince Jing had actually recovered, so he hurriedly explained the rest to Ye Qinghuan now.

Ye Qinghuan was so happy he sprinted a few laps on his horse, thinking about how happy his father and grandfather would be when they found out. He felt a bit annoyed that Prince Jing was using him as a messenger again, but it wasn't his first time, so once more wouldn't hurt! He rode his horse even faster than Li Yu and Prince Jing.

Faintly behind him, he heard Li Yu complaining to Prince Jing. “Tianchi, the lotus pond in Cheng’en Manor is really small…”

Ye Qinghuan really wasn’t sure what to make of that.

Li Yu was telling the truth, though. If he stretched out in his merman form, he could almost touch the bottom. It couldn’t compare to the pond in Prince Jing’s manor, where he could swim about freely.

Li Yu mentioned it in passing, and Prince Jing casually made note of it…then sent craftsmen to the Cheng’en Manor to make a few improvements to the lotus pond.

Li Yu had said he wasn’t tired, but by the time they got back to the manor, he was fast asleep in Prince Jing’s arms.

He didn’t have to run about anymore, so it was easy to get sleepy now, relaxed at last in the arms of the person he loved.

Prince Jing carefully carried Li Yu off of the donkey. The donkey relaxed and was about to let out a couple of brays when Prince Jing shot it a knifelike glance. It immediately stopped and allowed itself to be quietly led to the stables by the servants.

Prince Jing brought Li Yu into the room and placed him on the bed. He looked him over several times, and, once he’d confirmed he was truly uninjured, tucked him into the light blue brocade quilt with green edges. He got into bed too, and hugged the fish.

He’d had no choice but to ask Xiaoyu to deliver the tiger talisman, but Prince Jing still felt guilty about it. If Xiaoyu or their unborn child had been injured, Prince Jing would have stabbed himself without any hesitation.

Fortunately, they were both fine and the situation was over with.

Prince Jing held the fish in his arms. It was hard to even remember the frantic state in which he'd spent the previous night in Qianqing Palace.

The fish that delivered the talisman to the Cheng'en Manor must have run into a lot of dangers. Prince Jing, stuck in Qianqing Palace, had been filled with worry and distress.

Li Yu snorted twice in his sleep. He seemed to be uncomfortable sleeping on his side and wanted to change to lying on his stomach, but Prince Jing recalled that the imperial physician had said Li Yu shouldn't sleep on his stomach while pregnant, so he tried to get Li Yu to sleep next to him instead.

Li Yu's hands and feet roved over him, and once they all found a place, he settled down and continued to sleep soundly.

When he woke up, the fish needed a moment to figure out if he was in his fish tank or the lotus pond. Only when he saw his husband's sleeping face did he remember that they had overcome another obstacle together.

How nice. This time, he'd stayed determined and wasn't tricked at all, so he'd helped a lot. He'd definitely improved compared to the time at the western border.

There should be nothing else in the way of Prince Jing ascending to the throne after this obstacle.

Li Yu stared at his husband's handsome side profile. The more he stared at him, the happier he felt, and he leaned in to sneak a kiss. At the same time, he removed his limbs from where they were draped all over Prince Jing's body.

Now that Princess Langya's rebellion was quelled, would the "Share the Country" mission be completed?

Li Yu took the chance to enter the system, but he found that the mission was still in progress.

It still wasn’t over?

But the system had given give him a notification in response to the rebellion. Was it because if the throne was successfully stolen, the “country” in “Sharing the Country with the Tyrant” would be gone, so the system gave a clear signal in response to that milestone?

It seemed like completing the mission would need to wait until Prince Jing ascended to the throne. Li Yu wasn’t in a hurry.

He quickly checked in on the four children through the “Fish Children Status” function. The children were back already. Since he and Prince Jing were resting, Wang Xi hadn’t wanted to bother them, and so he’d taken the young masters to play in the manor instead. The four children were playing hide-and-seek with Wang-gonggong.

Li Yu smiled and exited the system.

When he woke up, he found that his hands and feet, which he’d previously taken off of Prince Jing, were now entangled with his husband again. How did that happen? Normally when he entered the system he’d lay there like a corpse, not cling to others. Did he sleepwalk?

No. Li Yu realized that Prince Jing was the one who’d held him, pulling him closer.

So, Prince Jing was the clingy one. How cute.

Li Yu smiled and kissed his husband, wanting to pinch his nose and wait for him to open his mouth to breathe before using his fishy kissing skills on him.

His plan was flawless, but in reality, he'd only just placed his finger on Prince Jing's face when his eyes opened.

…I wasn't—I didn't—I wasn't going to do anything bad!

The flustered fish was seen through immediately and kissed to pieces.

With the children settled in their rooms, it was the right time and place.

They hadn't done it since Li Yu found out he was pregnant, and he really wanted to right now. He tugged on Prince Jing's sash, giving him clear signals.

They were so close that every change in the other was obvious.

Prince Jing glanced at his flat stomach. When he'd asked imperial physicians before, they said that sex was not recommended during the early stages of pregnancy. Though he wanted it too, he knew he had to restrain himself.

"It'll be fine." Li Yu tried to persuade him. He really wanted it. "She's not fragile. I swam around and even rode a donkey… A-as long as we go slower than usual, it should be fine."

Li Yu tried his best to flirt, but he was still a bit shy. He fiddled with the quilt as he blushed and said, "I'm not very good at riding donkeys, but riding…I'm still good at."

He shot a look at Prince Jing after he quickly mumbled his way through the end of the sentence—but Prince Jing's hearing was quite good, and he heard it all.

To prove that he could do it, Li Yu changed his position to a more suitable one.

The lusty fish looked down, his eyelashes nervously fluttering like butterfly wings as his cheeks and ears turned red. He looked cute and tasty.

Prince Jing’s gaze was heavy as he straightened himself and kissed his consort. In his hoarse voice, he said, “Then let’s give it a try.”

Chapter 136:
Number One Fish in the World

PRINCESS LANGYA'S REBELLION had been quelled, and because her corpse had melted into nothing, her family bore the brunt of the emperor's fury.

The elderly Chang'an-jun, Princess Langya's father, knelt on the golden bricks of Qianqing Palace for an entire day and night, until he couldn't even straighten his back anymore. In the end, he passed out.

Originally, he had sent his daughter into the palace to protect the Loulan people, and so that she would be well taken care of. But Princess Langya had misunderstood him. Not only had she killed Empress Xiaohui and the fourth prince, she had even attempted to overthrow the empire.

When Princess Langya had first tried to kill the emperor, the entire royal family of Loulan had been turned into slaves. This time, perhaps even the King of Loulan's life wouldn't be enough.

The emperor executed all of Princess Langya's subordinates. As for the other Loulan royalty, he didn't kill them all. Instead, he sent them to guard the tombs of Empress Xiaohui and the fourth prince, so that they might pay for this crime for generations to come. He also conferred the title of Prince to the first and fourth princes, who had died too early.

As for Prince Jing's wet nurse, Pu Liu, who had left clues behind for them despite Princess Langya's coercion, the emperor rewarded her with a lavish funeral.

Princess Langya had a servant who knew martial arts. Because he refused to give in, he'd been killed by the guards. Later, it was discovered that this servant had also changed his appearance, but his original appearance had been very ordinary. It was strange that he'd felt the need to disguise himself in the first place.

The news traveled from Head Eunuch Luo to Li Yu. After some careful questioning about the servant's appearance, Li Yu found himself recalling the servant who had forced Pu Liu to take the poison. They had never been able to find that servant. Since Princess Langya was behind it all, perhaps that was the servant in the memory.

Princess Langya had caught the emperor completely off guard. It served as a warning: the palace was not a peaceful place. In order to completely rid the palace of any remaining Loulan influence, the emperor thoroughly investigated every single person in the palace.

The investigation unearthed many old incidents, and the emperor had no choice but to address them all.

It left him in a terrible mood. One that didn't seem to be improving.

Empress Xiaohui and the fourth prince were harmed by Princess Langya, but she'd done that because of him. If he had made a different decision in the beginning, he thought—if he had been a bit more cautious, a bit more careful—perhaps Empress Xiaohui and the fourth prince would still be here with them today.

But there was no medicine in the world that could cure regret. He had lost his wife forever.

The emperor suspended the court for several days, dispirited and listless, and had no energy to pay attention to the harem. Head Eunuch Luo

was out of ideas and secretly asked Prince Jing for help. He spent almost all his time around the emperor and knew very well that when the emperor's spirits were down, the little shizi was the most effective medicine. This time, it would be best if all four children could come.

Li Yu understood Head Eunuch Luo's difficulties. The emperor couldn't remain trapped in his own self-blame. There were still many military and national issues the emperor had to take care of, so they needed him to recover as fast as possible.

Of course, if the emperor carried on like this, perhaps Prince Jing could ascend to the throne more quickly… But selfishly, Li Yu didn't want Prince Jing to take this "shortcut." Prince Jing's relationship with his father had improved a lot lately. He truly hoped that the two of them could overcome their originally distant relationship and get back on the right track.

Prince Jing shared this position.

When Head Eunuch Luo came, Prince Jing nodded without hesitation. Li Yu exchanged a glance with Prince Jing and instantly understood: rather than the throne, Prince Jing preferred to maintain the precious relationship he'd developed with the emperor.

Very good! As expected of the man this fish had chosen! Even if his character setting was a tyrant, he was becoming more and more human! Li Yu was very proud of his husband. If he'd had his fish tail right now, it would be high up in the air.

Soon after, Li Yu and Prince Jing entered the palace with the children to see the emperor.

When the emperor heard the children’s babbling, the corners of his mouth really did go up.

Inside Dabao’s soft, white little fist was a piece of candy. He stumbled toward the emperor. This was something the fish brothers had recently discovered that was as delicious as peach blossom pastries. Dabao was eager to share it with Grandpa Emperor.

“Grandpa, eat candy.” Dabao placed the sweet in the emperor’s palm, then patted the emperor’s hand carefully.

Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao also extended their hands. When they opened their fists, they each had a piece—although Erbao, who loved to eat, only had half a piece.

“Eat candy, be happy.” The children all tried to say it at once.

This was something their wet nurse, Madam Qin, had said to them once when she was feeding them candy. Dabao had a good memory, so hearing it one time was enough for him to remember it, and he’d taught it to his brothers.

The emperor held the four children, tears streaming down his face. Although the candy the children presented to him seemed to be covered in spit, he still ate all of it.

The past was unbearable to look back on, but he had these tiny grandchildren now. For their sake, he had to pull himself together again.

“Tianchi, thank you,” the emperor chuckled. “Say, why didn’t you bring your pet fish?”

His mood seemed to have improved. Seeing Prince Jing, he recalled all the loyal subjects who’d stood by him amid Princess Langya’s rebellion. Prince Jing, Prince Li, General Huwei, Ye Qinghuan, the Duke of

Cheng'en… Though the emperor was in a sorry state that day, he remembered everything.

And there was Prince Jing's consort. Although he didn't know how to ride a horse, he came on a donkey to try to save him. They were all good people. The emperor decided to write an edict to reward them all.

Of course, he couldn't forget the fish that had delivered the tiger talisman.

The emperor thought the fish was very intelligent, and he knew that Prince Jing loved that fish. But he didn't see him bring it on this trip to the palace, so he made sure to ask after it.

Prince Jing exchanged a smile with Li Yu and said something about the fish being in the manor.

This fish had contributed to the safety of the country, so although it wasn't present, the emperor thought it was only right to reward it. He was never shy when it came to rewards. "I'll reward the fish with the title of 'Number One Fish in the World,'" he said, smiling.

Number One Fish in the World??

Li Yu repeated it in his head a few times. Prince Jing watched him with a smile. In his opinion, there was no title more suitable for Xiaoyu.

Under Prince Jing's appreciative gaze, Li Yu didn't have the heart to tell him that "Number One Fish in the World" felt a bit odd…

His reasoning was sound! After all, "Number One Lamb in the World" generally referred to delicious lamb meat. "Number One Dumpling in the World" meant the dumpling was delicious.

So "Number One Fish in the World" meant… *Shh!!*

But the high and mighty emperor couldn’t take back what he’d already decreed. With complicated feelings, Li Yu became “Number One Fish.”

Later on, Li Yu tactfully told Prince Jing, and the prince was speechless. It was just as the old saying said: “The benevolent see benevolence, and the wise see wisdom.” When it came to Xiaoyu, perhaps it was apt to say, “The gourmand sees gourmets.”

Though there was nothing particularly wrong with this interpretation of the title. Prince Jing licked his lips and said meaningfully, “Fish truly is delicious.”

What?? Prince Jing had stopped eating fish ever since he got a pet fish. Why was he saying fish was delicious?

Had he eaten fish recently?

Li Yu realized abruptly what Prince Jing was saying. Li Yu, who was not skilled at riding horses or donkeys, but *was* skilled at riding something else, once again started going red.

Though the emperor hadn’t been physically harmed during the Princess Langya incident, he quite clearly didn’t have as much energy as before.

In the past, he could discuss politics with court officials the whole night. Now hearing the word “politics” gave him a headache. But he couldn’t just ignore the issues that were piling up.

The emperor’s gaze fell on Prince Jing. When he was held hostage by Princess Langya, Prince Jing had stepped forward bravely several times. There was no need to test him any further. He wanted a suitable heir. Prince Jing was the most suitable and the most perfect.

He chuckled. “Tianchi, since you’re here, come help me with something.”

Prince Jing gave him an inquisitive look.

The emperor ordered Luo Ruisheng to bring over all the reports that had been piling up. Then he picked up his brush, pointed at the reports, and said, half jokingly, “If you go through all these reports for me, I’ll choose you as crown prince.”

Li Yu’s eyes widened, but he felt a little impatient. With the way things were now, Prince Jing had saved the emperor enough times to be the crown prince ten times over. Why did the emperor need to dangle it over their heads like this and ask Prince Jing to do paperwork? Did this mean if he didn’t do a good job, he couldn’t be the crown prince? Li Yu was worried about how Prince Jing was going to handle this.

Prince Jing did want to be the crown prince, and he wouldn’t dally when it came to the emperor’s requests. Without saying anything, he accepted the reports. The emperor admired his straightforward attitude.

Meanwhile, Head Eunuch Luo had to keep wiping sweat off his forehead. He knew something Prince Jing did not. The emperor had long since prepared the edict announcing Prince Jing as the crown prince. He was just messing around.

For some reason, since choosing his heir, the emperor seemed to become a bit unreasonable. Somehow Prince Jing had turned into the emperor’s laborer, leaving early in the mornings and returning late at night.

Li Yu had started having some pregnancy symptoms recently, and he’d been sleeping too much. He’d fall asleep as soon as the sky started to darken and wouldn’t wake up until nearly noon. With Prince Jing busy

doing work for the emperor, Li Yu barely got to see his husband at all. He'd always fall asleep before his husband got home and wake up after he had already left.

If he hadn't had something to wrap himself around every night, he might have suspected that Prince Jing was staying the night elsewhere. Fortunately, no matter how busy Prince Jing was or how late he returned, he'd always come home to Li Yu to hold him as they slept.

The piled-up reports were finally dealt with. The emperor was very happy with Prince Jing's work. He was waiting for Prince Jing to kiss up to him a little, then, with a soaring mood, he'd announce him as crown prince.

But Prince Jing didn't ask for the title of crown prince. He just asked the emperor to let him go home early.

He was just as stubborn as his father. Though he wanted to be crown prince, he cared about his wife and children more. If the emperor wanted him to be the crown prince, he would eagerly step up to the plate; but if the emperor wouldn't give him the title, he wouldn't try to take it.

Xiaoyu had once said, "Things that are yours will end up in your hands in the end, and things that are not yours will never stay in your hands."

The emperor sighed. He remembered Li Yu teaching that lesson to the children too. "Why are you in such a rush to get back home?" he chuckled.

This couple sure had a good relationship. Not even he and the empress had been this clingy back in the day.

Prince Jing was afraid the emperor would misunderstand Li Yu. "He…he's pregnant again," he said carefully. "I think of him constantly."

Prince Jing’s consort was pregnant again?!

The emperor was delighted. He no longer cared about the slight mishap from earlier. He sent Prince Jing away in a hurry, and even sent a group of imperial physicians with him, telling them to answer to Prince Jing’s every command and not to disturb the consort.

When Prince Jing returned, Li Yu was sitting in a rocking chair in the courtyard, wrapped up in a seaweed-green blanket and dozing off. Wang-gonggong was playing a game of eagle and chicks with the children. To the side, their pet rabbit was nibbling on bright green lettuce leaves, while two fat ducks swam together in the pond. They shook their wings, quacking to each other along with the laughter of the children. All sorts of noises filtered through Li Yu’s ears, and he vaguely heard Wang-gonggong chatting with someone.

“Our Highness is highly coveted among the aristocracy and nobles. Apparently, all these families have beautiful daughters just at the right age —they all want to come be the prince’s side consort.”

What side consort?!

Li Yu had been drifting off to sleep. As soon as he heard about the possibility of a rival, he shot awake immediately.

Chapter 137:
Green-Eyed Fishy

LI YU HAD JUST woken up—his temples were pounding, and his head was spinning. When he took a good look, he saw that Wang Xi was still playing with the children, not speaking at all.

It was probably just a dream.

But the dream was horribly real. With Prince Jing's current position, it was inevitable that he'd be desired by the other nobility sooner or later. In some ways, the emperor letting Prince Jing help with the paperwork was already an acknowledgment of his current status.

Apparently back when the second prince—the Marquis of An—was about to become crown prince, even he hadn't received such treatment from the emperor, never mind the hotheaded third prince, the Marquis of Ping.

But Prince Jing was different. He was the only living di son of the late empress; his lone criticized trait, his muteness, had been cured; and he'd even saved the emperor. What reason could the emperor have not to choose Prince Jing?

If there were court officials who'd hesitated to support Prince Jing before, they were now following the emperor's wishes.

Li Yu had once heard Wang Xi mention how respected Prince Jing was nowadays. And even if you ignored everything else, the emperor had ordered Prince Jing to attend court lately. Every day, after court was dismissed, you'd need more hands than any person had to count the number of officials who waited to walk the same way as Prince Jing.

These people hadn’t kissed up to Prince Jing before because the situation had been complicated, but they’d be stupid not to kiss up now.

But Prince Jing firmly remembered the emperor’s wariness and did not interact much with those people. The exception was Secretary Zheng, who Prince Jing would occasionally exchange a few words with. Zheng Jing had assisted him back when he worked at the Ministry of Works, so it made sense that they had a bit of a friendship.

But when anyone else tried to suck up to him, Prince Jing met them with a cold expression. He wouldn’t make it easy for them.

When Wang Xi mentioned how respected Prince Jing was now to Li Yu, he kept things happy and light. He didn’t dare speak of anything else.

Prince Jing was busy helping govern a country, so the weight of taking care of Li Yu was handed to Wang-gonggong. Because this pregnancy was happening in Li Yu’s human form, Prince Jing could explain everything to Wang Xi without reservations. He asked him to be very careful. Wang Xi couldn’t be more elated that the consort was pregnant again, and he was determined not to say anything unnecessary in front of Li Yu.

Naturally, there were ladies who wanted to marry Prince Jing—and there were many of them. But Prince Jing had never paid attention to any of them, nor did he take them seriously, so how could Wang Xi be the one to mention it?

Unfortunately, Li Yu was sensitive during his pregnancy, so his subconscious imagined the danger anyway. And the more he thought about it, the more it made sense.

In ancient times, all men had many wives. Li Yu trusted his husband, but ultimately Prince Jing had to answer to the emperor. If those nobles turned to the emperor when Prince Jing turned them down, and the emperor really did decide to impulsively appoint a few of them to Prince Jing's household, how could they get out of that? Was he supposed to play the role of a fish spirit ripping into a lusty fox spirit?

That wouldn't do! His husband had to be his and his only!

Li Yu stood up abruptly. Usually, he spent a little longer laying around after he woke up, but right now he had absolutely no intention of sleeping. He wanted to find Prince Jing right away. At that moment, Prince Jing just so happened to return with a few imperial physicians.

These physicians were all gynecological experts appointed by the emperor, so Li Yu never really came in contact with them. At first, he didn't even recognize who they were. The dream he'd been having had jumbled up his brain, and he thought these people were trying to get Prince Jing to marry their daughters. Li Yu froze and said aggressively, "You've brought them back to our home?"

He'd assumed Prince Jing would definitely say no, whether it was a matchmaking old man or a beautiful, elegant young lady. He'd thought he would ignore all of them. But look at this! Prince Jing had practically brought them right to his feet!

It was true after all! All men were pigs!

His wife was suddenly sad and indignant. Prince Jing had no idea what had happened.

Prince Jing's own intellect might be online, but he had no idea where the fish's brain had wandered off to. In his experience, though, if he

couldn’t understand what Xiaoyu was saying, it would be best just to agree with everything he said. Besides, the physicians *were* here to take Xiaoyu’s pulse, so Prince Jing nodded.

Li Yu immediately puffed up like a pufferfish and jabbed a finger right up to his face. “Then are you going to bring their daughters into the manor next?”

This was a huge accusation to hit all the physicians with at once.

“Consort,” one of them responded, trembling, “this old servant’s daughter…is only three.”

Another said weakly, “Consort, this old servant’s daughter is already a mother to three children.”

Li Yu suddenly came to the realization that he’d gotten it wrong. Now he took a closer look, he saw that these “officials” were all carrying small…medicine cases. Oh, these were imperial physicians!

In this world, imperial physicians were considered a kind of official; they had ranks and wore the same clothes as court officials. Li Yu had just assumed they must be the family of possible future side consorts—he completely forgot the possibility that they might be physicians.

This… He’d really embarrassed himself now!

There was no way the Number One Fish in the World could admit to such a mortifying thing, so Li Yu took a deep breath and immediately switched his demeanor. He smiled at the imperial physicians and extended his wrist. “Imperial physicians, are you here to take my pulse?”

The confused imperial physicians finally let out a sigh of relief. “That’s right, consort.”

Watching as Xiaoyu's attitude changed before his eyes, Prince Jing knew Xiaoyu had misunderstood something. But his health was more important. Prince Jing decided to put a pin in it for now. He held in his laughter and asked the physicians to quickly do their job.

The physicians were focused on their task, so they didn't pay much mind to the nonsense Li Yu had said. Everyone knew pregnant people tended to have mood swings—to the imperial physicians, an occasional bout of anger was no big deal at all. Some pregnant women even cursed their husbands to high heavens right before a birth.

When they took his pulse, the imperial physicians all said the consort was in good health and that the pregnancy was three months along. A few of them had heard of this male consort who was capable of giving birth and had been curious about him this whole time. Now that they'd seen for themselves, they could confirm Li Yu was indeed pregnant.

The imperial physician who the emperor had sent to the western border had come this time as well. Last time, he'd taken "Prince Jing's consort's" pulse behind a veil. Quite some time had passed since then, and this time Li Yu was getting his pulse taken for real, but the physician didn't notice anything had changed. He kept congratulating Prince Jing.

After that physician had examined Li Yu, Prince Jing thought, *Now the lie about Dabao and the others has been fully covered up.*

Prince Jing asked the imperial physicians for anything they had to be careful about, then sent them away, telling them to bring the good news to the emperor.

The outsiders left, and Prince Jing gave Li Yu an ambiguous smile.

Li Yu knew he was in trouble. He looked at the four children pitifully, hoping his sons could distract Prince Jing, but unfortunately three of the children were looking elsewhere—only Sibao received his father's distress signal.

Sibao, help me! Li Yu mouthed.

Sibao took a moment to react, but he could tell his fish daddy needed help, so he bravely walked over slowly on his short legs.

Li Yu was delighted, as Prince Jing doted on Sibao the most. As long as Sibao whined a bit, everything would be fine.

Li Yu tried to hide behind his son, but Prince Jing had his ways of dealing with this too. He glanced at Wang Xi. Wang Xi was about to arrange for the little masters' snack time, so he picked up Sibao, smiling. "Young master, let's go eat peach blossom pastries and candy, all right?"

Though Sibao didn't love food as much as Erbao did, he still couldn't resist the double temptation of peach blossom pastries and candy. He'd been playing for a while, after all, so he was hungry.

Sibao could only blink apologetically toward his fish father. *It's okay, Daddy Prince Jing will definitely help Fish Daddy*.

And then Sibao and his brothers left with Wang Xi.

This unreliable child!

Was it too late to pretend to be sleepy now?

Li Yu yawned on purpose, pretending like he wanted to return to their room for another nap. Perhaps when he woke up again, Prince Jing would forget what he had done. But Prince Jing had a good memory and he stopped the fish in time. He pulled him back and wrapped his arms around

him firmly. It would be difficult for the fish consort to escape now, even if he had wings.

Prince Jing chuckled at the man in his arms. “Xiaoyu, tell me. Who wants to enter the manor?”

Li Yu’s attempts to refuse to acknowledge the situation had all failed, so his only choice was to tell him what happened in the dream. Although it was just a dream, Li Yu was still very angry when he recalled it. “Those women who want to be your side consorts!” he said indignantly.

Prince Jing cleared his throat. Dreams didn’t come from nowhere. He’d already promised he wouldn’t take any more wives, so he hadn’t expected Xiaoyu to have such worries.

“Don’t worry, there won’t be anyone else,” he said lightly. What side consort? Prince Jing wouldn’t allow anyone else into their bed. He had his fish and that was more than enough!

Now that Prince Jing’s stance had been made clear, Li Yu’s eyes curved into pleased crescent moons. But he still didn’t forget to ask: “What about Royal Father?”

“He won’t do anything either.” Prince Jing hugged his jealous little fish and slowly explained something.

To be honest, Li Yu’s perception of the current situation was quite accurate. The emperor had indeed asked Prince Jing about other wives at one point. After all, marriage was a good way to form alliances.

But Prince Jing flatly refused.

The emperor had only brought it up casually; now that he knew how Prince Jing felt, he had no intentions of forcing him. There were indeed

officials who'd asked the emperor, but contrary to Li Yu's assumptions, the emperor didn't want to reward those officials with marriage.

There were many reasons. One was that the emperor had once put a lot of effort into arranging Prince Jing's marriage, but all the families he'd approved of had been reluctant to marry their daughters to Prince Jing and had come up with a variety of excuses to refuse. The emperor could tell they just didn't want to do it. Now that the prince was no longer mute and was held in high regard, about to be the crown prince, these people had changed their tunes at the drop of a hat. Now they were desperate to send their daughters into Prince Jing's manor.

The emperor's thoughts aligned with Wang Xi's: they'd looked down on his son before, but now they suddenly wanted him?

Too late!

Besides, Prince Jing's consort was very good, and the emperor didn't want to upset him for no reason. The emperor had learned his lesson from Princess Langya—what if he appointed someone to Prince Jing who ended up bringing him trouble? Expanding the royal family was the usual excuse, but clearly that wasn't a problem for Prince Jing.

Of course, if Prince Jing decided he wanted some concubines, the emperor wouldn't stand in his way, but Prince Jing had clearly stated he didn't want any, so the emperor wasn't going to force him.

As for the officials who'd found a way to ask the emperor, the emperor responded to all of them flippantly: "Unfortunately, even I can't convince Prince Jing…"

"That's what Royal Father said." Prince Jing relayed the emperor's stance quietly.

Li Yu's face was red, either from embarrassment or shyness. He had misunderstood the emperor. The emperor was as human as anyone else. If you were good to him, he wouldn't make life hard for you.

With a double guarantee, Li Yu felt completely reassured.

"…Sorry," he said, looking down. "I suddenly just couldn't help myself."

He didn't know what was going on either. Recently, he kept feeling like there were bursts of anger traveling up to his brain, making his thoughts a little muddled, as though he couldn't quite think clearly. Now that he'd calmed down, he felt like he'd been extremely unreasonable.

"It's not your fault… The imperial physicians said you would be a little more sensitive during pregnancy." Prince Jing rubbed Li Yu's head, showing that he didn't mind. "Besides," he added with a chuckle, "it's because you care about me."

Xiaoyu's personality was straightforward and blunt, and he rarely got mad at him. This was the first time he'd been unreasonable. Even if Xiaoyu was cursing him to his face, he would still like him.

If the situation was reversed and Xiaoyu brought a bunch of men home… The result would've been disastrous.

Li Yu had received Prince Jing's reassurance, and Prince Jing didn't have to do hard labor for the emperor anymore. With his husband's company, Li Yu's mood improved quickly.

Meanwhile, the physicians who had examined Li Yu reported their diagnosis to the emperor: Prince Jing's consort was indeed pregnant.

The emperor couldn't contain his smile. He flipped through the reports Prince Jing had looked through over the last few days. He had

wanted to pick a good day to send out the edict, but now he felt like there was no need to wait anymore. There was no time like the present. Why not double the good news?

So, the emperor ordered Head Eunuch Luo to summon the six Ministers and Prince Li. He wanted to officially appoint Prince Jing as the crown prince in front of his top officials and the royal family.

Chapter 138:
Fishy Writing Lesson

PRINCE LI AND THE SIX MINISTERS had all mostly guessed the emperor's decision already. They just hadn't expected him to decide so quickly, because in the last dozen or so years, the emperor had never officially named a crown prince. Even if he had treated a certain prince differently, the emperor had stayed wary of him even as he educated him; he never made an announcement too early.

Prince Li and the Ministers all found Prince Jing extremely satisfactory. They had no objections to choosing him as the crown prince—but as the emperor's subjects, they couldn't just outright agree. A ruler's thoughts were difficult to guess, after all. After careful consideration, they all knelt. "Your Majesty is still young, please give it due consideration."

The emperor smiled but didn't say anything.

He had thought he was young before too. But after everything that had happened recently, he'd come to the realization that he was no longer in his prime. When Princess Langya attacked, he couldn't even defend himself. It was humiliating, but there was nothing he could do. Even though the danger was temporary and had already passed, the enemy had been too insidious, disguising themselves as someone he never expected. After being under someone else's control, his age was starting to show. No matter how much he rested, his energy levels were no longer what they used to be.

Even if he didn't want to admit it, people rarely lived past seventy. Considering that, over half his life was already over. He didn't know how

many more years he had left. Discovering the truth behind the deaths of Empress Xiaohui and the fourth prince had been a huge blow to him.

He'd been emperor for a long time, but when it came to some things, he was still powerless. His power and status couldn't bring back his dead wife, nor could it rewind time. It was time to let go of the power he'd been wielding for so long.

He'd tested the waters first, letting Prince Jing handle government matters, and realized Prince Jing did well. Pleased with the results, he thought that since he'd already made his decision, why not just announce it and let go of his power? Either way, he no longer had the energy to care about politics. It was only natural for the crown prince to take over. If he started handling things now, his ascent to the throne could go smoothly.

The emperor only gave it brief consideration, but he'd already imagined the coronation of the future emperor. He was a little shocked—but naming Prince Jing the crown prince meant it was just a matter of time. The emperor quickly let go of his reservations.

Despite Prince Li and the ministers' repeated urging, the emperor never changed his mind. In the end, they all expressed that they would support all the emperor's decisions.

So, during the next court session, Prince Li read the prepared edict in front of everyone, officially appointing Prince Jing as the crown prince.

This time, the emperor hadn't revealed anything to Prince Jing, so Prince Jing was shocked. What had seemed like a normal court session ended with him becoming the crown prince. He froze up for a good while until, at Prince Li's repeated urging, he finally kneeled. In front of the entire court, he thanked the emperor. In that moment, many thoughts flashed

through his mind. When he came back to reality, he'd only just finished thanking the emperor.

In order to demonstrate how much he valued the crown prince, the emperor smiled and gave him an effusive round of encouragement. Then, he ordered the Ministers to help the crown prince familiarize himself with the various responsibilities of the Six Ministries and help him take care of government matters.

Once they'd received their orders, the Ministry of Rites immediately started preparing for the ceremony.

After court, the emperor asked the crown prince to stay behind.

"Tianchi, how do you feel?" the emperor asked.

When Mu Tianchi came to court this morning, everyone was still calling him "Prince Jing." After this edict, he'd become the "crown prince." It was all so sudden, but he couldn't say that to the emperor, so he just nodded, feeling complicated.

The emperor chuckled as he patted his shoulder. "…Do well."

Actually, the emperor had a whole lot to say about this crown prince position, not to mention their father-son relationship that was just starting to improve. He just didn't know where to start.

The emperor heard that during the incident with Princess Langya, Dabao had tried to come save him with a tiny slingshot. The child's actions warmed his heart, but he was also fascinated that such a tiny child could be so brave. Did he also want a reward?

When he asked Dabao, Dabao couldn't explain it clearly himself. "You're his grandfather," Li Yu had said. "It was the natural thing to do."

The emperor had witnessed all kinds of plots in his lifetime, and he was used to everyone having an ulterior motive. He'd forgotten that one could still do things without looking for anything in return. It was just familial love. Dabao wanted to save him because he was his grandfather, because he was family.

Dabao was like that, and so was Prince Jing. Even though Prince Jing never brought it up, the emperor was very aware that if Prince Jing hadn't come to save him that day and had let him be killed by Princess Langya, no one would have blamed him, and Prince Jing might even be on the throne already.

But Prince Jing had stepped in. That was proof of the love he had for him.

Choosing his words carefully, the emperor said something he never would have before.

"Tianchi, if you don't disappoint me, I won't disappoint you."

The crown prince had never expected that the emperor would be so honest with him. He also nodded slowly, trying to accept it.

"Oh right, there's something else I've been thinking about for a long time." The emperor looked at the crown prince amiably. He'd already become crown prince, so the emperor didn't think there was any point in beating around the bush any longer. He just said what he was thinking.

"When you got married on the western border, I wasn't able to attend, and that is still a regret of mine. After the crown prince ceremony, I want to hold another wedding for you and your consort… Tianchi, what do you think?"

Back in Prince Jing’s manor, on a whim, Li Yu was teaching Dabao how to write.

Although he was only one year old, Dabao could read many different words. The emperor had hired a teacher just for Dabao, and every day, the teacher would assign Dabao writing homework.

Despite his young age, Dabao was the most hardworking student in the imperial study room. He always needed to complete whatever the teacher assigned him. When the other children came home from their lessons, they’d eat a snack and take a nap. But after taking a brief nap, Dabao would get up by himself and have Wang Xi carry him to the study to write.

Normally, he studied under his teacher, and the emperor often taught him here and there as well. He now held the brush properly in his small, soft hands, but the writing really couldn’t be considered pretty.

But that didn’t affect Dabao’s desire to learn.

Li Yu happened to pass by and see Dabao writing. He was bent over with his little butt sticking out, his expression serious and concentrated. For some reason, Li Yu was reminded of his husband, who often had the exact same expression. He struggled to hold in his laughter until his stomach hurt.

When he took another look at Dabao’s writing, Li Yu finally cracked.

After being laughed at by his fish dad, Dabao pouted so hard that you could have hung a bottle from his lips.

“Dabao, let Dad teach you.”

Now that he’d laughed at his son, Li Yu immediately tried to remedy the situation. Thinking back to the way Prince Jing had taught him, Li Yu’s

heart felt like it was filled with honey. Imitating Prince Jing, he held Dabao's soft little hand with his own and started writing.

"Dabao, follow Dad," he said. "Just write how I'm writing it."

Now that Li Yu was no longer worried about the possibility of a side concubine, he was dealing well with his pregnancy and in great spirits. He wrote quickly; once he finished a page, he'd stop and let Dabao observe.

Dabao was originally looking forward to Li Yu's writing. Even the Grand Secretaries couldn't stop praising Daddy Prince Jing's writing, so Fish Dad must be at a similar level. But once Fish Dad finished writing a page, Dabao's dreams were shattered.

Fish Dad's writing was even worse than his. Dabao felt cheated. He was no longer willing to let Fish Dad teach him to write. But Fish Dad had no idea. He was itching to continue teaching. So Dabao turned around so that his little butt was facing Fish Dad, refusing.

Li Yu suddenly realized he was being criticized by his son…

The fish didn't have the word "criticism" in his vocabulary!

Li Yu scoffed and threw down Dabao's brush, intending to teach this brat who dared judge his fish dad a lesson. Realizing something was wrong, Dabao hurriedly slid down from the table and started running. Li Yu rushed forward, flipping Dabao around. He blew on his hands to warm them up and started tickling Dabao.

Dabao giggled loudly. The adult and child were both having a great time when Wang Xi suddenly ran in like his life depended on it. Wang Xi caught his breath with a hand resting on the door, crazy with joy.

"Consort, th-there's huge news—His Highness has become the crown prince!"

No way, just like that?!

He'd expected the emperor to wait a bit—at least another year or two, or maybe even four or five. After all, the emperor really cared about his power. Perhaps he'd even test Prince Jing some more. Last time, he sent Prince Jing to the western border, so perhaps next it would be the southern border. He really didn't expect the emperor to appoint him as crown prince so soon…

Well, okay, when the emperor asked Prince Jing to handle official matters, Li Yu *had* more or less had an idea.

In the book, Prince Jing never became the crown prince. But his husband had done it. Though he wasn't officially on the throne, he was very close to it.

Li Yu's eyes were a little wet, but he was genuinely happy for his husband. He was just thinking about how to celebrate after Prince Jing got home when Wang Xi said, "Now that His Highness is the crown prince, you're the crown prince consort. The edict will arrive soon. The emperor also said that after the ceremony, he wants to hold another wedding for you and His Highness…"

Li Yu's bliss immediately gave way to fear. No way—he'd already given birth to four fish, plus he had their daughter inside of him, and now he had to get married again?

"What did His Highness say?" he asked.

He hoped his husband would reject the emperor. It was a little embarrassing to get married with a round stomach. Besides, they'd already consummated their marriage twice and held a ceremony once, so it felt weird to do it again.

“His Highness…” Wang Xi was about to respond when he spotted his master walking in through the door out of the corner of his eye. Wang-gonggong smiled and shook his head. “You can ask him yourself.”

Recently, Wang Xi had gotten even better at reading his master’s expressions. As soon as his master returned, Wang-gonggong immediately retreated with the young master in tow.

“Tianchi, you’re the crown prince now?” Li Yu was delighted to see his husband. He walked over happily, supporting his stomach.

He was already starting to show. Mu Tianchi worried every time he saw him walk, so he hurriedly told him to stop, walked up to Li Yu, and then reached over to support him, encouraging the fish to lean on him.

“His Highness the Crown Prince!” Li Yu winked at him triumphantly.

Mu Tianchi had been feeling a little cautious, but the way Xiaoyu was acting made him want to laugh. Having been given the title of crown prince, he was one huge step closer to his goal. He knew very well that without Xiaoyu, he might still be a mute prince to this day. Where would this crown prince position have been then?

“Xiaoyu, everything is thanks to you,” he said. “Thank you.”

That was what he’d wanted to say the most at morning court.

“Huh? Huh? Are you being polite with me? I already heard Wang Xi say it. Congratulations, Your Highness… I heard Royal Father wants to hold another wedding for us?”

Thinking of the scale of the wedding back on the western border, Li Yu’s heart started pounding at the thought of all those people.

Prince Jing thought he wasn’t happy and held his hand nervously. “Because of your current state, I didn’t say yes… Do you think I’m mistreating you?”

“Really? How could I think that?!” Li Yu burst into laughter. Prince Jing really said no? As expected of his man! They were on the same page even when it came to things like this.

Li Yu was still praising his man in his mind when his man said, “I told Royal Father we can wait until after you give birth and recover. You deserve to have everything in the world.”

A satisfied smile hung on Prince Jing’s lips as he made this promise, but Li Yu on the other hand…

Holding the wedding after the birth? He might as well not have said no after all!

The Princess of Jinjue said that after she gave birth she’d felt like a cloth sack that had been emptied out. He was really afraid of getting married as a cloth sack… But looking at Prince Jing’s expression… Did Prince Jing really like it? Even though Li Yu found it embarrassing?

After all, they’d be able to consummate their marriage once again.

…Never mind. Since his husband liked it, he’d deal with it when the time came.

It was just drinking the marriage wine, red blankets, and wedding robes. He was experienced when it came to wedding play; he’d just lose some weight after giving birth.

Li Yu felt his skinny waist and slowly started to look forward to the wedding.

Li Yu’s reaction to his husband becoming the crown prince seemed normal. The crown prince himself also thought his consort was very calm, as expected of a carp spirit.

But somehow, in the middle of the night, things went awry.

The fish woke up several times, shoving his husband awake and yelling urgently. “Tianchi, you’re really the crown prince now?”

Mu Tianchi nodded for what felt like the thousandth time, patted Li Yu on the back, and held him.

As it turned out, this fish wasn’t truly calm—he was just slow to react.

Li Pregnancy-Brain Yu was so happy he could fly. *My husband is the crown prince ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! Fishydance.gif*

Chapter 139:
Original Fishy Form

PRINCE JING BECAME the crown prince, so Li Yu became the crown prince consort.

In this era, Li Yu had no family or background. He'd thought this would cause him difficulty, and the crown prince had been prepared too: if anyone had something to say about the consort, he'd rebuke them right then and there. But not a single official said a word.

It wasn't that nobody coveted the position of crown prince consort. After all, once the crown prince became the emperor, the crown prince consort would be the empress. Who wouldn't want to fight for that possibility? But despite the efforts of those people, Prince Jing and his consort's relationship held strong. Prince Jing never even ended up getting a side consort—never mind a side consort, he didn't even have any concubines or servants. The emperor was clearly also letting Prince Jing do whatever he wanted. Now that Prince Jing was the crown prince, how could they possibly manage to steal the crown prince consort position?

They might even anger the crown prince with their efforts, which wouldn't be worth it. There was no point in making an enemy of the person you were trying to marry.

Though Li Yu's lack of background was a detriment, he already had four sons, and all four of them were loved by the emperor. As soon as they were born, the emperor had given them titles, and often sat them on his knee. His affection for them was obvious. If anyone else wanted to become the crown prince consort, they'd be offending these young royal grandsons.

Nobody dared, so nobody said anything when Li Yu became the crown prince consort.

And so that was that. The crown prince currently lived in his manor. The emperor wanted him to move into the palace, but the crown prince said his manor was fine, and that there was no need to make such a huge fuss. Considering that the consort was in the midst of his pregnancy, the emperor decided moving was indeed too much work. Besides, the crown princes of this dynasty hadn't all lived in the palace, so the emperor acquiesced and instead renamed his manor the Crown Prince Manor. The couple still lived there and were simply assigned more guards to match the standards of a crown prince.

The emperor gave out all the titles and honors he intended to and felt very satisfied. Afterward, however, he realized something. Dabao was originally the Prince Jing heir. Now that Prince Jing was the crown prince, Dabao could no longer hold that title.

Although being the son of the crown prince was much better than being the son of an ordinary prince, the fact remained that the other children all had titles, but Dabao didn't. The emperor firmly decided that this was a slight to Dabao and could not let it slide. With a wave of his hand, he gave Dabao the title of "Commandant of Light Chariots," a standard class, rank three position.

At first, the emperor had wanted to name him a prince and give him Prince Jing's original title. It would've made a lovely story. But when he told Luo Ruisheng this idea, Head Eunuch Luo's knees nearly went soft from the fright. He rushed to convince the emperor to change his mind, so

the emperor settled for the “Commandant of Light Chariots.” But even so, the emperor still thought Dabao deserved more.

When Li Yu received the official edict, his mouth kept twitching in disbelief. He’d been really worried the emperor would show too much favor to Dabao and give him the title of crown grandson. What would they do then? Good thing the emperor was still capable of seeing reason.

Dabao was a very lucky fish. Everything had gone smoothly for him ever since his birth. He’d even helped his fathers win over his grandfather. How could a child less than two years old hold a rank three position? What kind of luck was that?

The true koi of their family was clearly Dabao.

Having been officially granted titles, they had to go to the palace to thank the emperor, so Li Yu got ready to leave. He’d never liked to go outside much to begin with, and since he became pregnant, he was even more careful. But he had no choice but to go to the palace. Earlier, Li Yu had sent a note to his husband, the crown prince, to let him know.

He even brought the crystal bottle with the fish body double inside. The emperor had given him the “Number One Fish in the World” title, so he had to thank the emperor for that too. Might as well get all of it done in one trip.

Wang Xi accompanied Li Yu into the palace. As the consort was now with child, Wang Xi picked a round-faced servant girl who knew both martial arts and medicine to stay closely by Li Yu’s side.

They were just about to leave when the crown prince sent a message asking Li Yu to wait a little bit.

The servant who came to pass along the message didn't know anything else. Li Yu thought it was weird, but he still listened to his husband and delayed his trip to the palace.

After about half an hour, the crown prince rushed back into the manor.

Li Yu was surprised at first, then smiled. "Why are you here?"

The crown prince smiled back. "I'm taking you to the palace."

"Ah, that's such a hassle…" Li Yu kept on saying that, but he had a big smile on his face. Clearly, he was thinking something different on the inside. Who didn't like it when their other half was always thinking of them?

Prince Jing always personally accompanied him everywhere. Even now that he was the crown prince, this habit remained unchanged. For the last few days, the crown prince had been busy at the Ministry of Rites, but because Li Yu had wanted to enter the palace, he rushed back home.

"Will…this affect you negatively?" Li Yu was not-so-secretly delighted but knew his husband was always one step away from being criticized.

The crown prince smiled easily. "No, I've already asked the minister for leave."

Li Yu nodded, somewhat understanding. It was fine as long as he got permission. He felt like this minister was very sympathetic toward his subordinates.

But he completely forgot about his husband's current status. Even if he hadn't asked for permission, nobody at the Ministry of Rites would dare stop the crown prince.

Now that the crown prince had hurried back home just for this, the couple left for the palace together. The crown prince had rushed to the manor on horseback, but the consort couldn’t ride a horse while he was pregnant. Both he and his consort rode in a carriage to return to the palace comfortably.

The carriage traveled slowly. By the time they arrived at the palace, the consort had already comfortably taken a nap in the crown prince’s arms.

“We’re here already?”

Li Yu had always thought there was quite a bit of distance between home and the palace, but this time the time passed quickly.

Wang Xi, who was following the carriage, tried his best not to laugh. The crown prince knew exactly how fast that wasn’t.

The crown prince helped Li Yu off the carriage, and one of Head Eunuch Luo’s underlings was already waiting for them. As soon as he saw the crown prince, he bowed, then led everyone to Qianqing Palace.

Because the consort was pregnant, the servant had prepared a soft palanquin for him. The crown prince glanced at it, then shook his head, ordering Wang Xi to bring out the small palanquin he’d brought with them from the manor.

What??? When had his husband prepared this? How come he didn’t know?

But it meant he didn’t have to walk, so the lazy fish immediately sat down. He assumed the crown prince would come sit with him and patted the space next to him. But the crown prince remained unmoving.

The palanquin wasn’t as large as a carriage, and the crown prince was afraid of squishing Li Yu, so he didn’t get on. Instead, he pulled open all the curtains. That way, Li Yu wouldn’t feel cramped inside, and he could keep an eye on his fish.

After the consort sat down, eight servants from the manor lifted the palanquin up and started walking. The crown prince followed alongside.

The palace servants had heard that the crown prince and his consort were very affectionate, but they never expected to be slapped in the face with such obvious PDA just from a palanquin.

Since the crown prince didn’t need him, the servant went back to Qianqing Palace first to inform the emperor.

The palanquin traveled slowly. With nothing else to do, Li Yu observed the scenery around him. When they passed by the imperial garden, Li Yu suddenly spotted something white among the bushes. Li Yu’s heart skipped a beat. “Hold on,” he said hurriedly.

The crown prince ordered the servants to stop, then turned to Li Yu.

“That white thing…” Li Yu said. Were his eyes playing tricks on him? It looked like Piaoxue.

Back when he was delivering the tiger talisman, Piaoxue had helped him lure away the guards. Afterward, Li Yu had asked Wang-gonggong if Piaoxue had been caught by the guards. The guards had thought Piaoxue was just a feral cat, so they never searched for it around the cold palace. Later on, during the battle at Qianqing Palace, the cold palace remained relatively untouched.

Li Yu was very happy that Piaoxue hadn’t been injured on his account. But because of the bad blood between the crown prince and Lady

Qiu and the Marquis of An, Li Yu couldn’t let it show too much. Li Yu asked Wang-gonggong to pass Piaoxue a bag of little dried fish as thanks.

Though he hadn’t ordered Wang-gonggong to do anything else, after the servants at the cold palace found out Wang-gonggong from the crown prince’s manor cared for this cat, they no longer dared to bully Piaoxue, and as a result, Lady Qiu’s conditions improved a bit as well.

Li Yu didn’t hide any of this from the crown prince. He told him directly. The crown prince was very familiar with his character; Xiaoyu was kind and always repaid a favor. Even if the other party was a cat, he would still do his best to thank them. The crown prince trusted him to handle the situation and fully believed in him.

On this trip to the palace, Li Yu had asked Wang Xi to bring some little dried fish, just in case they ran into Piaoxue. Because of this, Piaoxue had been at the back of his mind this whole time. Now that he saw a ball of white in the imperial garden, he automatically assumed it was the cat.

Following Li Yu’s gaze, the crown prince also saw it. The round-faced servant, Xiaoluo, went over to look. After a while, she came back holding a cat. Because this cat hadn’t been checked over, Xiaoluo was afraid to approach. She only took a few steps forward so the consort could take a look.

Li Yu immediately recognized Piaoxue. What a coincidence!

“What’s wrong with it?” Why was it hiding in the bushes?

Xiaoluo examined Piaoxue carefully. It was very clean, but there was the smell of blood on it. After taking a sniff and examining Piaoxue’s body, she discovered that there was a thick layer of gauze on one of Piaoxue’s back legs. There was blood on the gauze.

“It’s injured,” she said.

Wang Xi moved forward, testing the cat’s fur with a silver needle. The needle didn’t change color. Wang Xi looked toward the crown prince for his decision.

Normally, that was enough of a test. Hearing that Piaoxue’s leg was injured, though, Li Yu was a little worried, and he looked at the crown prince pleadingly.

He couldn’t resist Li Yu’s large, round eyes. He turned and coughed lightly. “Take another look. Nothing wrong with being careful.”

The crown prince ordered Xiaoluo to hold on to the cat, and to not approach. He walked over himself to examine Piaoxue. Seeing the prince, Piaoxue suddenly started yowling pitifully. It bit the gauze on its leg, and the blood slowly started to spread.

As a result, the crown prince noticed the injury on its leg. He thought about it for a moment, then said to Xiaoluo, “Unwrap it.”

Xiaoluo carried a medical kit with her, so if there was nothing wrong with the injury, she could rewrap it for Piaoxue. Not daring to disregard the crown prince’s orders, she immediately unwrapped the gauze. A ball of red cloth rolled out from underneath.

Xiaoluo thought it was weird. Upon further inspection, although there was blood on Piaoxue’s leg, there was no injury. The blood had probably come from the fabric.

“It’s my mistake!” Xiaoluo immediately kneeled down to beg for forgiveness.

“What’s wrong?” Li Yu was still in the palanquin. He was surprised to see Xiaoluo suddenly kneel down.

“…Nothing, we’re rewrapping the cat’s wound, don’t worry.” The crown prince’s expression grew dark. Piaoxue hadn’t been injured, but had been wrapped in gauze to mislead someone into thinking it was injured—there was definitely something suspicious about the thing inside the gauze.

Many explanations came to the crown prince’s mind at once, but he was afraid of alarming the fish, so he kept his voice steady.

With that explanation, Li Yu calmed down and continued to wait.

The crown prince glanced at Wang Xi, who immediately pulled Xiaoluo up. The two of them walked a little further away with Piaoxue and removed the gauze and fabric from its leg.

They confirmed that the blood had come from the fabric. Wang Xi had seen many things; he could tell there was something wrong with the fabric. If an unsuspecting person got too close to Piaoxue, they might have touched whatever was on the fabric.

Xiaoluo covered her hand with a handkerchief and opened the fabric up, revealing more and more blood.

The blood was incredibly pungent. Xiaoluo hurried to cover her nose. “What is this?”

Wang Xi looked it over carefully. “Your Highness, this isn’t human blood. This old servant thinks it’s dog blood or chicken blood.”

“What is it for?”

“I’ve heard that people would sometimes use dog blood or chicken blood to drive away evil, especially the blood of a black dog.”

“…Evil?”

The crown prince had never heard of such a thing. Hiding this so carefully within some gauze—it was all just to drive away evil?

“Yes, to drive away evil and spirits,” said Wang Xi. “Apparently if yao touch such blood, their original form will be revealed immediately.”

Spirits revealing their original form? The crown prince’s expression immediately changed and he looked at Xiaoyu, who was still waiting for him on the palanquin.

There was a spirit right next to him. If they hadn’t discovered it, Xiaoyu might’ve touched Piaoxue, then the fabric. Then what would’ve happened?

A voice in his head told him Xiaoyu would’ve transformed in front of everyone.

Xiaoyu’s original form was a fish.

He had thought it was strange that such a thing would appear on a cat from the cold palace, and that they would meet it on their way to Qianqing Palace, at that.

…Perhaps someone had discovered Xiaoyu’s true identity and wanted to harm him!

Chapter 140:
Crafty Fishy

“NOBODY IS ALLOWED to reveal to anyone else what happened here.” The crown prince gave strict orders to everyone present. Wang Xi and everyone else immediately shut up.

Li Yu sat for a while in the palanquin, but the crown prince never had Xiaoluo bring Piaoxue over.

“What is it?” Li Yu felt a little uneasy.

Throughout his entire pregnancy so far, he had really felt how much his husband cared for him—perhaps even a little too much. If he really wasn’t allowed to touch the cat, he’d just ask Wang-gonggong to feed the cat for him.

He knew the constant checks were for his own good. Since he became pregnant, he often had a hard time controlling his emotions, so he tried to avoid getting angry.

Mu Tianchi ordered Wang Xi to secretly dispose of the bloody fabric and kept Xiaoluo in charge of holding Piaoxue. He came back over to Li Yu and said gently, “We’re pretty close to Jingtai Hall. Why don’t we stop there first?”

Li Yu didn’t really care where they went, but the emperor was waiting for them. Was it all right to delay? The crown prince clearly had something he wanted to say. Did they have to change their plans because something had happened?

But Li Yu believed in the crown prince, so he agreed easily. “Then let’s go.”

The crown prince drew the curtains and turned the palanquin in a different direction, toward Jingtai Hall.

After they left, in the corner of the imperial garden, a person stepped out hurriedly from behind a Persian silk tree, looked toward the crown prince and his entourage, then turned to leave. Very quickly, a guard from the crown prince’s manor followed quietly after.

As the crown prince’s former quarters, Jingtai Hall remained untouched for him. This was an interesting place, where unbelievable things kept happening. Li Yu and the crown prince had found their first clues leading to the Loulan assassin here. But the Loulan forces had been eradicated from the palace, so why had the crown prince brought him here this time?

Definitely not for *that*. Li Yu had learned his lesson—he wasn’t going to make an assumption like that again.

The crown prince first helped Li Yu into a chair, putting a cushion woven from gold thread behind his back so that he could be comfortable.

After Li Yu finally settled down, the crown prince called out to him solemnly. “Xiaoyu.”

“Hm?” *Husband, why are you being so serious?*

“Someone did something to Piaoxue,” the crown prince said. “We found something inside the gauze wrapped around its leg.”

The crown prince was afraid to tell Xiaoyu everything at once, in case he scared Xiaoyu, so he only explained a little at a time.

There was something wrong with the gauze around Piaoxue's leg? Li Yu paused. Was that why the crown prince hadn't let Xiaoluo bring the cat over?

Judging by how the crown prince was behaving, that was definitely it.

"What was it?" Li Yu asked.

"Dog's blood."

Huh? The only kind of dog blood Li Yu knew anything about was gratuitous media tropes,[5] but that clearly wasn't what the crown prince meant. "What is it for?" he asked curiously.

The crown prince was silent for a moment. His brow furrowed. "You don't know?"

The fish with a system said defensively, "I've never even seen it, so of course not."

…Fine, Xiaoyu was just an innocent carp spirit. Perhaps he didn't have any experience with such things. The crown prince slowly explained the use of dog blood. The fish was completely shocked.

Li Yu's mouth gaped especially wide when he heard that a yao would be forced to transform back into their original form. So wide he could fit in half his fist.

"Dog blood would make me…???"

Oh god, it would make him reveal his true form?! What kind of deus ex machina was that?!

Though fish with systems belonged to the fantasy genre, he wasn't superstitious! What original form? And besides, his actual original form was human!

If this thing could make him human forever, that would be great. But if it was that easy, why did he have to do all those quests? This fish didn't fear such a thing!

Hey…hang on, wait!

Li Yu suddenly remembered he'd told the crown prince he was a carp spirit. From that angle, he should be afraid of transforming, so he *should* fear the dog's blood.

How did one display fear again?

Li Yu's expression froze for a moment as he tried his best to make it show fear.

When he saw how still he was, the crown prince thought he'd been frightened—it made him even angrier. He held Li Yu's hand tightly. "I won't let you face any danger."

Li Yu felt like something had bumped into his heart, and he nodded lightly. He had always known that no matter the danger, this man would protect him no matter what.

"Do you have any idea who it could be?" the crown prince asked.

Li Yu was lost. He barely left the house these days, focusing all his energy on the child in his stomach. If he could offend someone by doing that, he would have offended everyone under the sun by now. Was it another hidden boss? Please, no—Princess Langya was enough! He didn't want any more surprises!

The crown prince was also familiar with the way Li Yu spent his days, and he knew it couldn't have anything to do with Xiaoyu. Besides, whoever had tampered with Piaoxue on their way to Qianqing Palace had to be someone from the palace. He'd left behind some guards to keep an eye on the imperial garden. Piaoxue was just a cat, so whoever was behind this would definitely follow Piaoxue. All he had to do was follow the trail.

He scoffed coldly. "We'll find out soon enough."

The crown prince ordered Wang Xi to let the emperor know that his consort was a little tired and that they would head over to meet him after a little break.

Li Yu was bored, snacking on a plate of peach blossom pastries he'd brought from the manor. All he'd done today was eat and watch his belly grow, riding around in carriages and palanquins. How could he possibly be tired?

…Aha, the crown prince was probably trying to lure out the enemy!

Li Yu immediately put down the pastries, pretending to be so tired he couldn't even lift an arm. "Tianchi, I'm so tired." He fluttered his eyelashes at his husband, fixing him with a charged gaze.

The prince was now so familiar with the fish that he could tell what he wanted from just a flick of his tail. He held in his laughter as he fed the fish a piece of pastry. The fish might have suddenly seemed tired and weak, but as soon as the pastry reached his lips, he polished off the entire thing.

Watching his lively fish, the crown prince was determined to protect him.

After about ten minutes, a guard came to report that the guard who'd stayed behind in the imperial garden did indeed spot a servant spying on

them. When he followed the servant, the guard found that they entered Yongfu Palace and never came back out.

Yongfu Palace? Li Yu was confused. Wasn't that where Consort Zhang, Princess Langya, had lived?

But wasn't she dead?

"There's…still someone living there?"

Mu Tianchi chuckled coldly. Of course there was. Princess Langya was dead, but there was a male consort still living in Yongfu Palace's side chambers… A noble lady with the last name Chu. He'd only managed to get into the palace on Princess Langya's "recommendation."

"It's—Chu Yanyu? He wants to harm me???"

Li Yu couldn't believe it.

But according to the guards, the person spying in the garden lived in the side halls of Yongfu Palace. There was no one else it could be but Chu Yanyu.

He thought about it carefully, but he had practically never spoken to Chu Yanyu before. The only time they'd interacted was when he stopped Chu Yanyu from drugging his husband. After that, he'd barely even seen the man. Because Noble Lady Chu didn't have a high status, it wasn't usually his place to speak up. Every time they saw each other, it was just a brief glance.

Besides, he was the wife of the male lead, and Chu Yanyu was the male lead's father's concubine. There was no reason for them to fight. Why did Chu Yanyu want to pour dog's blood on him?

…Was there something wrong with his brain?

The crown prince gave it more thought than Li Yu did. “It’s unclear where Chu Yanyu stands,” he said. “He might have connections to Princess Langya.”

After all, Noble Lady Chu was brought into the palace on Princess Langya’s “recommendation,” and had once been the lover of the sixth prince—whose name had been removed from the royal family records. This might just be a last-ditch attempt to lash out.

Chu Yanyu had followed Princess Langya since the revolt started, but the emperor hadn’t punished him. There was a reason for that. That day, when the emperor was detained within Qianqing Palace, Chu Yanyu stayed at Princess Langya’s side but kept secretly observing the emperor.

Though he couldn’t help the emperor escape, a cup of water, a bowl of tea, was enough for the man to leave a deep impression on the emperor.

The emperor had given Pu Liu a lavish funeral, then come in person to ask after Chu Yanyu. Noble Lady Chu just claimed he had been forced by Princess Langya and had no choice. The emperor couldn’t find any evidence of Noble Lady Chu colluding with Princess Langya, and so, since he pitied him, he didn’t investigate any further.

After Princess Langya died, Noble Lady Chu’s life improved.

When Yongfu Palace was sealed, Noble Lady Chu kept living in the side halls. The emperor had picked out a palace, wanting Noble Lady Chu to live there, but Noble Lady Chu said that it would be better if he stayed in the side halls, as he could constantly be reminded of his mistakes and pray for the emperor.

And with that, Noble Lady Chu started to climb up the ranks, using Princess Langya as his stepping stone.

But the emperor no longer cared so much about the harem. Though Noble Lady Chu had left an impression on him, the emperor didn't show him much attention. Perhaps Noble Lady Chu could ascend to the status of concubine in a few years, but that was probably it.

The crown prince was very familiar with Chu Yanyu's past. He usually wouldn't spare any of the emperor's concubines an extra glance, and no matter what kind of existence Chu Yanyu led at his manor, now that he was a noble lady, the crown prince didn't intend to bring up anything unnecessary to the emperor. As long as he kept to himself, they could leave each other alone. The crown prince wouldn't do anything.

But Noble Lady Chu should not have touched his consort.

If he knew Xiaoyu's identity, the crown prince would not allow him to spread the news any further.

"…Tianchi, Tianchi!" Seeing the crown prince deep in thought, Li Yu waved two fingers in front of his face. The crown prince grabbed the playful hand, smiling. "Why did Chu Yanyu try to harm me with that?" Li Yu asked. "Does he know something?"

Although Li Yu wouldn't actually be harmed by the blood, if Chu Yanyu had discovered his identity somehow when he wasn't paying attention, it would be bad if the news got out. They had to get to the bottom of this.

The crown prince immediately pulled Li Yu in close, kissing his palm. "…I'll find out."

Chu Yanyu was just a noble lady, so he only had two female servants and two eunuchs. The guards quickly found out that one of Chu Yanyu's servants had gone to the hunting grounds during the hunt. When she

returned, she seemed to be in a daze, saying she saw a monster. Everyone said she was hysterical, and nobody believed her. As of late, this servant often spoke to Noble Lady Chu for long periods of time behind closed doors.

Li Yu was confused. “I didn’t let anything slip at the hunting grounds. Even when I did transform, you were always there—”

Wait, there had been that one time!

It was when the crown prince’s emotions became too intense, and he vomited up blood. The imperial physicians had examined the prince overnight, and he had stood guard over him. When he had to transform, he was in a rush and went to the neighboring tent to do it. Was it then?

Although he had turned into a manmer and scared the passersby when he was delivering the tiger talisman, he had transformed from a fish to a manmer. Nobody could’ve known that that “monster” was the crown prince consort. It was impossible for someone to find out that the consort could turn into a fish unless they witnessed the transformation from human to fish. That was the only way!

Li Yu recounted the situation at the hunting ground, and the crown prince nodded. The servant might’ve witnessed Xiaoyu transforming. And though Chu Yanyu might not have known about the fish bringing the tiger talisman, he had seen Xiaoyu slap the sixth prince. Combined with the words of his servant, Chu Yanyu might have suspected something.

But why did he plot to have Xiaoyu transform?

“Your Highness, I have an idea.” Li Yu looked toward the prince, rubbing his hands together excitedly.

This gaze that didn’t fear chaos, coupled with this mischievous tone!

The crown prince chuckled. “Do as you like. I’ll clean up after you.”

“You’re so good to me!” Li Yu cheered and jumped. Last time at the hunting ground, he didn’t get to have enough fun. He’d make up for it this time. He was a hardworking carp spirit: if Chu Yanyu wanted him to transform, he’d transform!

Li Yu smiled. This time, he’d brought the crystal bottle and fish double with him. It was time for them to get to work again!

An hour later, the small palanquin from the crown prince’s manor rushed toward the gates.

The servant who’d been spying in the imperial garden returned. When he got to Jingtai Hall, he saw there was a palanquin about to leave, so he followed.

The wind rustled the curtains of the palanquin, and the servant clearly saw that there was no one inside. There was only a huge crystal bottle that held a silver carp speckled with gold, elegantly waving its tail.

Chapter 141:
Fishy Outfit Change

WHEN CHU YANYU found out from his trusted servant that there was nothing in the crown prince consort's palanquin but a fish in a crystal bottle, he bit his lip heavily.

The crown prince's consort really was a fish yao. He had guessed correctly.

At first, when one of his servants kept saying the consort was a fish, Chu Yanyu didn't believe her. After all, how could a live human be a fish? But during the Princess Langya incident, he saw for himself the way Prince Jing's fish jumped up and slapped the sixth prince. He'd seen the fish many times, but this was the first time he'd seen it slap anyone, so now he couldn't help but pay attention to it.

Then he found out that this fish had helped the crown prince deliver the tiger talisman, apparently to the crown prince consort, which was how the consort was able to get in contact with the troops. Chu Yanyu thought the fish seemed a little too intelligent.

Suddenly, a few memories stirred.

Back when he was in the sixth prince's manor, he'd heard Mu Tianxiao mutter about Prince Jing's fish. The sixth prince thought there was something wrong with the fish, but despite all his suspicions he'd never managed to discover anything.

Then he heard the Marquis of An's mother, Lady Qiu, mention that Prince Jing's fish was not normal. It could fly, and it even slapped her.

After the Marquis of An went crazy, he would also often mention the fish.

If only one person thought there was something up with the fish, Chu Yanyu might just laugh it off. But when two or three people all said so, he had to conclude that something was off.

When the servant brought up the crown prince consort turning into a fish, Chu Yanyu's heart skipped a beat. Was that the truth? Was the consort not human, but a fish?

He immediately ordered the servant to recount everything that had happened in minute detail.

Chu Yanyu had attended the hunting festival himself; he knew the crown prince had fallen ill there and required medical attention. The timing and locations of what the servant said matched up to what he knew, and the fish which the servant said the crown prince consort had turned into was the same one that Chu Yanyu already thought was suspicious.

If the consort could really transform into a fish, then he was a yao. That would explain the fish's intelligence.

Besides, the crown prince consort was the Li-gongzi who used to be in Prince Jing's manor. Other people might not be aware, but Chu Yanyu knew all about it. But Li-gongzi had also appeared suddenly in Prince Jing's manor—that was weird too.

The crown prince consort's name…was Li Yu. His name literally meant "carp."

Was that it? Was he—really a carp?

Chu Yanyu wanted to confirm his guess. He knew from the books he'd read that there was a folk method: using the blood of a black dog to

revert a yao to its original form.

Chu Yanyu decided to try it out. With great difficulty, he managed to procure some blood, but he couldn't figure out how to get the crown prince consort to touch it.

He'd been in the palace for a while now but was still just a lowly noble lady. He could only acquire a little bit of news through bribery in the first place, and information about the crown prince's manor was very hard to come by in the palace. However, there was one thing that seemed unrelated, but gave him an idea.

Apparently, Wang-gonggong from the crown prince's manor often went to the cold palace and fed little dried fish to Lady Qiu's cat, Piaoxue.

Once, when Wang Xi came to feed Piaoxue, Chu Yanyu came to secretly watch from afar.

As Wang Xi fed the cat, he told the cat that this was from the crown prince consort. And so, Chu Yanyu was able to craft a plan.

While Piaoxue was looking for food, he caught it and kept it inside Yongfu Palace for a few days.

Once he caught wind that the crown prince and his wife were entering the palace, he wrapped gauze around Piaoxue's leg himself. Beneath the gauze was a ball of fabric soaked in dog's blood. It would be hard to notice just from the outside.

He heard the consort was very kind and kept ducks and rabbits at the manor. So how would he react to an "injured" Piaoxue?

The answer was clear…

With that, Chu Yanyu ordered his trusted servant to put Piaoxue somewhere in the imperial garden and to keep an eye on it from afar.

The crown prince and his entourage really did take Piaoxue away. But they didn't go to Qianqing Palace. Instead, they returned to Jingtai Hall! When Chu Yanyu asked his servant to go look again, he discovered the crown prince consort's palanquin contained only a fish. Chu Yanyu smiled.

Just as he suspected: the crown prince consort was a fish yao!

Originally, he'd hoped to one day become the emperor's favored concubine. If things were going well, he'd use him. If not, he'd step on the sixth prince to get what he wanted. But unfortunately, life was unpredictable. The sixth prince had tried to plot against Prince Jing but was unsuccessful and was put in prison. Then he found out that the sixth prince's mother, Consort Zhang, was actually Princess Langya from Loulan. Chu Yanyu's plans were completely ruined.

And disregarding all that, he only found out how difficult a concubine's life was after he already got to the palace.

Consort Zhang—Princess Langya—had tampered with the emperor's wine, making him very drunk. That was how Chu Yanyu had climbed into his bed. In actuality, the drunk emperor hadn't done anything to him. Chu Yanyu knew this, but he would never clarify that.

After becoming a noble lady, he realized the emperor didn't have much interest in male consorts. He'd had another male consort once, when he was young, but in recent years this was the only one he'd had.

At the time, Chu Yanyu was in a rush to get into the palace, so he didn't know what any of that meant. After he became a noble lady, he was

left alone every day. That was when he realized that not every concubine was the same.

The lower ranking concubines, no matter if they were male or female, had to be carried into the emperor’s chambers to be bedded.

At first, he thought it was embarrassing, but since becoming a noble lady, he’d never once been carried. Even his servants started to look at him differently.

At each banquet, he would always have a seat next to the emperor. To those who weren’t aware, he seemed highly favored by the emperor. But he knew this was just an act the emperor put on to make the harem seem at peace; he probably didn’t even remember his name.

There was the saying “If the wine is fragrant, it doesn’t matter how far down the alley it is,” but the emperor’s attention didn’t work like that.

The emperor had seen too many beautiful people. Chu Yanyu’s looks didn’t stand out. He was well-versed in poetry and songs, but the emperor would never ask him to come show off his talents.

The worst part was not that he wasn’t better than everyone else—it was that he was never even given a chance to prove himself.

Chu Yanyu realized that before he could exact revenge on the sixth prince, he had to have the emperor’s affections, so he started to fight for them. But it was even harder than getting Prince Jing’s attention. Every method he could think up, everyone else had already used it thousands of times.

He was stuck in an awkward situation: he couldn’t advance, nor was there any possibility of retreat. When the sixth prince fell, he lost his target for revenge but also his support.

Later, Consort Zhang turned into Princess Langya, from Loulan. Chu Yanyu couldn’t have been more shocked.

Princess Langya then told him a secret: that he also had Loulan blood in him. That was why she had originally chosen him to be by the sixth prince’s side. Chu Yanyu was afraid of his identity being exposed, so he had no choice but to listen to Princess Langya.

From his days in the palace, he knew one had to have a backup plan. He also knew that adding icing to a cake could never compare to helping someone in their time of need, so he purposefully took care of the emperor behind Princess Langya’s back. This “kindness” was the reason his life was spared.

Princess Langya was dead, so he was now the only one remaining who knew that he was of Loulan descent. The threat was gone. The emperor treated him better than before too, but Chu Yanyu still felt like it wasn’t enough.

The goals that kept him going before had all disappeared. He could only do his best to become a favored concubine and work hard to climb up.

That was when the emperor picked his heir.

Chu Yanyu suddenly realized that the emperor was old. Whether or not he was a favored concubine was no longer important. Even if he was, in the end, he might have to become a monk or be buried with the emperor as a sacrifice.

Knowing he was trapped, what was the point in fighting for more?

He was still young. How could he bear wasting his youth on the emperor? He was unsatisfied.

So he set his sights on the crown prince instead. Compared to the emperor, the crown prince was the rising sun.

Everyone in the palace knew the crown prince and his consort were in love. Chu Yanyu had seen it too. Once, they were listening to the opera in the palace when the pregnant crown prince consort fell asleep halfway through. The crown prince asked for the emperor's forgiveness and carried his consort home.

This was such a small thing, but Chu Yanyu cared.

This was the kind of affection he had once dreamed of. Why was it that in the end, after all he had suffered, he was still just a Noble Lady with no one to care for him? On the other hand, the crown prince consort's life was smooth sailing. He had everything without even trying.

In fact, the crown prince consort's status was much higher than his. Chu Yanyu had to bow to him.

Chu Yanyu felt unsatisfied with this…until he found out the consort's secret. He knew this was his chance.

"Go send a message to the crown prince," Chu Yanyu ordered his servant.

He was in a good mood. He fixed his clothing in the bronze mirror, then on a whim, put on a bit of lipstick at his dressing table. He was only satisfied once his lips were plump and alluring.

"Chu Yanyu—he wants to see you?" Li Yu held the secret report the guards had brought over, fidgeting. What the hell? He'd thought that after he tricked Chu Yanyu, Chu Yanyu would go expose him to the emperor. Wasn't that usually how it went?

But Chu Yanyu chose not to do that. Instead, he secretly sent a note to the crown prince. He was treating him, the crown prince consort, like he was just air!

Fuck, he'd been wondering what exactly Chu Yanyu was after—turned out it was his husband! Li Yu turned into a jealous fish on the spot.

"…Are you going to go? Are you going to go?!" Li Yu asked unhappily, not noticing he sounded like a parrot. He held the crown prince's arm, opening his mouth to gently bite down, his pointy teeth pressing into his husband's flesh.

If he gave him the wrong answer, he'd take a chunk out of him!

Mu Tianchi burst out laughing, secretly enjoying the fish's jealousy, but he was afraid that Li Yu would hurt himself. He rubbed his head to comfort him. "I'm not going," he said resolutely.

That's more like it!

"Oh," said Li Yu smugly, then went from biting the other man to giving him a kiss. The kiss was very loud, making the crown prince's ears turn red.

The crown prince said he wouldn't go, and that was that. The person Chu Yanyu had sent over with the note didn't even get to see the prince.

When Wang Xi came out to relay the crown prince's message, he didn't even deign to look at the messenger. With the crown prince's status, how could a lowly noble lady summon him whenever he wanted?

Wang Xi could guess what Noble Lady Chu's intentions were with just his toes. He was one step away from calling Noble Lady Chu shameless right to his face.

The messenger left, dejected. Chu Yanyu waited for him hopefully, but all he got was the crown prince's rejection. He didn't believe it at first. "How is that possible? Didn't you tell him I had important information regarding his consort?"

"I did, many times," his servant said helplessly. "But Wang-gonggong just said the crown prince didn't want to come see you."

…The crown prince didn't want to come see him!

Chu Yanyu was infuriated. When the crown prince was Prince Jing, he'd never really looked at him. And now, when he might have something against the prince, he still wouldn't take him seriously. How could he treat him so coldly? He just wanted to save him from the fish yao—and in exchange, he wanted a place at his side.

Although his current status was a little iffy, as long as the crown prince became the emperor, nothing was impossible.

When he saw how loving the crown prince and his consort were with each other, he didn't just feel admiration—he was insanely jealous. He also wanted someone to treat *him* like that.

At one point, he had been very close in proximity to the crown prince too, but the prince never gave him a chance.

Since he couldn't have it, he'd destroy it.

"You did this to yourself!" Chu Yanyu's eyes were red as he swept the bronze mirror before him to the ground.

He sat for a long time at the table before getting up. He fixed his hair, then, leading his servant, he walked to Qianqing Palace, limping.

Chu Yanyu had finally made his move!

Li Yu was excited.

What were they going to do if the antagonist wasn't following the script?

The crown prince's answer: *We'll just have to force him to follow the script.*

Now that Chu Yanyu was going to see the emperor, Li Yu had to get moving too.

"Who should I pretend to be?" Li Yu looked at his husband excitedly. At the hunting ground, Mu Tianchi had pretended to be a guard to protect him. Now it was his turn to pretend!

To be honest, it would have been enough for him to just sit in the palanquin—he didn't need to get dressed up. But the consort clearly wanted to have some fun.

The crown prince thought about it, then a smile made its way to his eyes.

There was no way he could pretend to be a guard, as there were no pregnant guards. There was, however, a wet nurse who rode the palanquin to Qianqing Palace with the crown prince.

Although this newly minted wet nurse was a little on the bigger side, with her stomach a bit large, she was still young, beautiful, and charming. Even His Highness the Crown Prince, who loved his consort deeply, couldn't help but take a few extra looks.

Chapter 142:
Fishy Yao Catcher

CHU YANYU was waiting outside Qianqing Palace to see the emperor. The emperor had a good impression of him, so he allowed him to enter.

When he entered the palace, he realized that the crown prince's children were there as well. The children of a yao must also be yao, so it was no wonder they were able to capture the emperor's heart. Chu Yanyu felt disdain toward these yao.

Dabao and the others were studying in the imperial study room when the emperor heard that the crown prince and his consort were coming, and he ordered Luo Ruisheng to go get them so that the family could be together.

The children spent a lot of time around the emperor, so they'd seen the emperor's concubines frequently too. In order to gain the favor of the emperor, Noble Lady Chu had also tried to be good to the children, and he often brought them little jade figures or toys, but the babies had been warned by their fish dad to not get too close to strangers or accept their gifts. Noble Lady Chu never managed to build a relationship with them.

When he saw the kids this time, Chu Yanyu's attitude was visibly a lot colder and not as enthusiastic as usual. Though the children were young, they were still able to tell. Very quickly, they noticed the Noble Lady Chu who always smiled at them wasn't smiling anymore.

“He’s so fickle,” the children whispered among themselves. Fickle was a new word they’d learned recently, and they used it a lot.

When the emperor heard their childish words, he burst into laughter. Meanwhile, Chu Yanyu couldn’t be more embarrassed. He had to just pretend he hadn’t heard.

“Your Majesty, I have something important to report.” Chu Yanyu took a step forward and knelt down.

Because this had to do with the fish yao, the children would be in the way. Chu Yanyu hoped the emperor would have them taken away.

“Just say what you need to.”

Even though Chu Yanyu was trying to take precautions, the emperor didn’t care. To him, Dabao and the others were his grandchildren, not outsiders. There was no need for them to leave.

Chu Yanyu gritted his teeth. It seemed like he would have to say it in front of these yao.

He’d already gone over what he’d say on the way to Qianqing Palace: he relayed what his servant had seen at the hunting grounds and the fact that there was nothing but a fish inside the crown prince consort’s palanquin. He didn’t outright say that the consort was a fish yao, but the implication was obvious.

The emperor’s first reaction was disbelief. It would be too preposterous if he believed a real, living human was a yao just from one person’s words alone.

“What do you mean?” he scolded Chu Yanyu in a stern voice. “Are you accusing the crown prince consort?”

Though the emperor had a good impression of Noble Lady Chu, he considered the crown prince consort part of his family. His impression of Noble Lady Chu was not enough for him to suspect the crown prince consort—instead, his displeasure fell on Noble Lady Chu.

Dabao was right by the emperor's side, listening. Had Fish Dad been discovered?

Dabao hurried to pull on the sleeves of the dragon robe.

Seeing this, the emperor picked Dabao up to sit him on his knees in case Noble Lady Chu said anything else and scared the boy. Chu Yanyu had helped the emperor before, but the emperor would not allow a concubine to slander the crown prince consort.

"Noble Lady Chu is speaking nonsense," he said. "Take him to the Office of Punishment!"

At the emperor's orders, Head Eunuch Luo immediately came up to grab Chu Yanyu, looking at him like he was already dead. The emperor had a very good impression of the crown prince consort; was Noble Lady Chu tired of living, accusing him of something like that? If it got around to the consort's husband, he would have offended both the emperor and the crown prince!

But Chu Yanyu continued to struggle. "Your Majesty, please, please listen to me—you've seen that fish," he protested. "Don't you think it's a little too intelligent? Besides, have you ever seen the crown prince consort and the fish appear at the same time? It's simple: the crown prince consort is that fish! They cannot possibly appear at the same time! I can promise everything I've said is true. If I'm lying, may I be struck down by lightning!" Eventually he was screaming at the emperor at the top of his

lungs, even going so far as to swear an oath. “Your Majesty, please think about it. The crown prince consort’s name is Li Yu. He’s clearly a fish yao!”

Chu Yanyu’s screams roused the emperor’s fury. Hearing all this, Dabao hung his head and trembled a little. The emperor was enraged and worried. “Silence! I don’t believe it. He has to be a fish yao just because his name is Li Yu?”

There was a decorated general in this dynasty whose name included the character for “rabbit.” There was a talented musician whose name had the character “turtle.” Were they rabbit yao, turtle yao?

Did Chu Yanyu have a brain or not? Sure, the emperor had never seen the crown prince consort appear at the same time as the fish, but there were plenty of people who hadn’t. Were they all also involved?

How ridiculous.

Chu Yanyu was all but pushed out by Head Eunuch Luo, yet he still persisted. “Your Majesty, what I’m saying is true. The crown prince consort has reverted back to his original form now and is hiding in the palanquin leaving the palace. If you send someone, you’ll see.”

The emperor didn’t want to bother with him, but at that moment, a servant came to report that the crown prince had arrived.

Right on time! The emperor immediately summoned the crown prince.

“Tianchi, Noble Lady Chu tried to slander your consort. How should we deal with him?” The emperor’s head hurt from all the yelling, and he wanted to comfort Dabao, so he threw all the responsibility to the crown prince.

“Royal Father, my fish is indeed very intelligent,” the crown prince said. “Everyone knows that. But I didn’t expect anyone would fail to hold their tongue and slander my consort like this. I want to hear exactly what his accusations are.”

The emperor glanced at the crown prince, confused. He wanted Chu Yanyu to continue?

Chu Yanyu was the only person claiming the crown prince consort could turn into a fish. The emperor was well aware of how loving the couple was. There was no way the crown prince would usually allow Chu Yanyu to continue to spout his nonsense, but he didn’t seem worried…

Never mind. Since the emperor had already passed the responsibility onto the crown prince, he could deal with it however he saw fit.

Chu Yanyu was shocked. He didn’t know why the crown prince had suddenly changed his mind and decided to see him. No matter—he was finally willing to listen to him!

Chu Yanyu rushed to speak. “Your Highness, I’m doing this for your sake… Please send someone to investigate the consort’s palanquin.”

Mu Tianchi raised a brow. “What’s wrong with the palanquin?”

Unexpectedly, the crown prince cooperated with Chu Yanyu and ordered someone to redirect the palanquin to the palace.

Soon after, the guards returned with a crystal bottle in hand. “Your Highness, there’s no one in the palanquin. Only this crystal bottle containing a fish!”

Got you! Chu Yanyu was secretly delighted.

The guard entered, holding the crystal bottle. A silver koi flecked with gold appeared before the emperor and crown prince.

Mu Tianchi scoffed. “So what if this fish was in the palanquin?”

“This fish is a fish yao,” said Chu Yanyu. “It can turn into the crown prince consort—that’s why it’s in the consort’s palanquin. Your Highness, if you don’t believe me, you can summon the consort…”

Chu Yanyu was sure the crown prince consort could not appear. But before he finished speaking, a young woman with a round belly, wearing a light yellow pleated skirt and her hair wrapped atop her head, walked in from the outside.

There was a thin veil over the woman’s face, covering everything below the nose. All that peeked out was a pair of bright, clear eyes. Seeing the emperor, she bowed to him clumsily.

The small woman had to bow when faced with the crown prince. Mu Tianchi clenched his teeth. Before she could do anything, he pulled over a chair and stuffed the woman into it.

Because the servants hadn’t announced her, the emperor and Head Eunuch Luo didn’t know who she was. They all looked toward the woman. Once she sat down, she noticed the emperor and Head Eunuch Luo were both looking at her, and she smiled at the both of them, a little embarrassed.

When she smiled, her eyes curved like crescent moons. The emperor thought it looked familiar, but he couldn’t quite work out why. Head Eunuch Luo was more observant, and he noticed the woman’s stomach. It seemed larger than that of someone who was simply chubby, but her waist was not thick.

Was this—!

Head Eunuch Luo had already worked it out, but when he looked at the crown prince and the woman, he could tell they clearly wanted to keep up their act. He had to just pretend he was blind and hadn't noticed anything.

"Tianchi, who's this?" the emperor asked, confused.

"This is Dabao and the others' new wet nurse," the crown prince said.

The emperor was bewildered. It was just a wet nurse, but such a big deal was being made over her. Perhaps that's what the crown prince wanted. The emperor wasn't sure.

Dabao scratched his head, curious. Crown Prince Daddy said this was his wet nurse, but he'd never seen her before! Dabao slid down from the emperor's knees and ran to the wet nurse to see, only for the wet nurse to scoop him up.

The new wet nurse blew into her hands and tickled Dabao right under the armpits a few times.

…W-w-wasn't this how his fish dad tickled him?

This was his fish dad!

Dabao threw himself at him, unwilling to let go of the wet nurse's leg.

Just now, when Noble Lady Chu kept saying Fish Dad was a fish, Dabao had really been scared. Fish Dad said their identities had to remain a secret. If they were found out, they'd be locked up, so Fish Dad's identity could not be revealed.

When the crystal bottle was brought in, the children all looked at the fish inside, unable to help themselves. But after they took a look, they were

reassured. That fish was just an old friend. Fish Dad was fine.

Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao all ran over to the wet nurse as well. When they realized it was their fish dad, Erbao was just about to call out when the veiled woman gave him a fierce glare, then shushed him lightly.

Erbao was so scared he didn't dare make a noise, but he still wanted a hug.

Hm…I guess that really is their wet nurse, the emperor thought.

Chu Yanyu hadn't seen the crown prince consort much, so of course he wasn't able to recognize him. And after the appearance of this woman, no one was paying attention to him anymore. He had to remind the emperor and the crown prince about the crown prince consort being a fish yao!

"Your Highness," he said clearly, "this fish is your consort."

Mu Tianchi retracted his gaze from the new arrival. Chu Yanyu thought it seemed a little weird. The crown prince gazed at the wet nurse passionately, but when he looked at him or the fish, he didn't seem to care! But Chu Yanyu didn't have time to think it through carefully.

The crown prince glanced at the fish in the bottle. "You say that's my consort. If you call out to it, will it answer?"

Pfft! The veiled woman couldn't help but snort in laughter, but after a glare from the crown prince, she immediately went back to holding the children properly.

Chu Yanyu had expected the crown prince to ask him that and had already thought of an answer to expose the fish yao in front of the emperor and crown prince. He stepped forward. "There is a Daoist priest waiting just outside. He's experienced in capturing yao. Please allow him to get rid of this yao."

Mu Tianchi nodded, expressionless. Xiaoyu had told him he wasn't a normal carp spirit and that it didn't matter if it was a Daoist priest or monk, black dog's blood, or anything else—they were all useless against him. Besides, they weren't being used on him anyway, so Mu Tianchi allowed Xiaoyu to watch in disguise.

Very quickly, a Daoist priest around thirty years old with a yellowing beard walked in.

Chu Yanyu had prepared this Daoist priest a long time ago—he was the same one who'd provided Chu Yanyu with the black dog's blood. Immediately, he started performing a ritual on the fish.

He shook a golden bell relentlessly, chanting something, and dipped a peach wood sword and talisman into the water in the crystal bottle.

After he was done, the fish kept swimming slowly.

So he did it again. The fish still kept swimming.

The Daoist priest and Chu Yanyu were both stunned.

The Daoist priest had run out of ideas. "Fish yao are afraid of black dog's blood," he suggested. "To be honest, Emperor, Crown Prince, it has turned back into a fish because it came in contact with the black dog's blood. If we use the blood again, it will definitely reveal itself."

Chu Yanyu agreed and even boldly looked at the crown prince's four sons. What he didn't say was that these four might also fear dog's blood.

Mu Tianchi smiled. "How would we get it to reveal itself?"

Chu Yanyu pulled out a porcelain bottle from within his sleeve. When he opened it, a pungent smell floated out. He handed the bottle over to the priest, and with a brief apology, he placed the bottle before the fish.

He thought the fish would definitely show fear, but it remained unmoved, shaking its tail haughtily.

The wet nurse held the children, and they also observed the situation. Smelling the pungent scent, the wet nurse covered their noses. “Ugh, stinky,” the children complained.

The emperor also thought it stank. Head Eunuch Luo brought over a handkerchief to cover his mouth and nose.

“This is the reveal you spoke of?” the crown prince scoffed.

Cold sweat beaded on the priest’s forehead. The emperor had seen enough too.

Seeing that the fish remained unchanged even after all their attempts, Chu Yanyu was starting to get flustered. He wanted to pour the dog’s blood into the crystal bottle. He refused to believe that the fish yao could still withstand that!

Chu Yanyu grabbed the bottle from the priest and was about to dump the blood in when the wet nurse, who had been silent this whole time, suddenly spoke up. “If you do that, not even a regular fish would be able to take it.”

“What do you know?” Chu Yanyu said rudely. “Fish yao are yao. They’re different from regular fish. Yao can’t be killed easily. As long as it uses any yao magic at all, it’ll prove me right.”

“I see…” said the wet nurse. “But what if it’s just a regular fish?”

“Then I’ll beg the crown prince consort for forgiveness and let the crown prince do as he sees fit!” Chu Yanyu said forcefully.

The wet nurse took a deep breath. “All right…”

There were no yao in this ancient era, only a fish with a system. He wanted to watch Chu Yanyu flounder a little more, but if he didn’t put an end to this now, the fish stunt double might suffer a bottle full of dog’s blood and become unbearably stinky.

“Noble Lady Chu, before you pour the blood, you should take a look at who I am.”

The next moment, the wet nurse took off her veil.

Chapter 143:
Fishy Teasing Husband

THE SIGHT of that unexpected face truly came as a harsh blow to Chu Yanyu.

Once she removed her veil, this woman that he found so puzzling turned out to be the crown prince consort himself!

“A-aren’t you—” He backed up in a panic, looking at the fish in the crystal bottle.

The fish swam around carelessly and blew a bubble toward Chu Yanyu.

…How could the crown prince consort appear in the same place as the fish? Wasn’t the fish the consort? Chu Yanyu felt like his brain had completely glitched out.

“Noble Lady Chu,” Li Yu said seriously. “Since you’re so sure I’m a fish yao, come try and force me back to my original form.”

“This is impossible. This is impossible, Your Highness…” Chu Yanyu’s expression was ugly as he turned to the crown prince. Mu Tianchi’s expression remained calm, not at all shocked.

Seeing this, Chu Yanyu realized the crown prince must’ve known the wet nurse was his consort all along. This…was all a plot to trick him. He was the only one who didn’t know, and they let him leap about like a clown!

Throughout such a grand performance, the emperor noticed the crown prince remained calm and collected throughout. It wasn’t until the

crown prince consort showed his face that he realized why the wet nurse seemed so familiar, as well as why the crown prince was allowing Chu Yanyu to do as he pleased.

Before, the emperor had put on a show for the sixth prince. Now it was the crown prince and his consort putting on a show together for Noble Lady Chu.

If he didn't have ulterior motives, how could he have become the main character of the show?

The emperor looked at Noble Lady Chu with utter contempt.

The crown prince's pet fish was a koi—it had been confirmed by Master Liao Kong—and the consort was a real, live human. With just a few words from any random person, he had been made out to be a fish yao?

If Noble Lady Chu could think up such rumors, the emperor thought, then all the good things he'd done before could also be fake. Kindness and tenderness were all ways for this person to gain his favor. He was actually the same as the sixth prince—all he knew was tricking people. As expected from someone who'd come from the sixth prince.

But Chu Yanyu was just a lowly noble lady. What good would it do him to harm the prince's consort?

After puzzling over it for a bit, the emperor finally figured it out. He trusted the crown prince and wouldn't distance him over something like this. He was, however, disgusted with Chu Yanyu. This male concubine thought too highly of himself.

Facing the crown prince's consort, Chu Yanyu had all sorts of guesses but was too afraid to say anything else.

But the Daoist priest that he'd found had no situational awareness. When the crown prince consort said, "Come try and force me back to my original form," Noble Lady Chu didn't move, but the Daoist was sure this was a fish yao and waved his gold bell.

The bell rang. The crown prince consort remained calm. There was absolutely no effect.

"How dare you?!" The crown prince was furious. How dare the priest "insult" his consort right in front of him? The prince immediately shielded his consort behind his back.

The priest was still wildly ringing his bell. Annoyed, the crown prince sent the priest flying with a single kick. The kick was so strong that the priest hit a pillar headfirst and passed out, bleeding.

"Take him away," said the crown prince.

Guards immediately appeared on either side of him and dragged away the unconscious priest. Chu Yanyu covered his mouth tightly. The crown prince's ruthlessness had really frightened him, but he couldn't even make a sound.

Wang Xi walked over, and the crown prince glanced at him. Wang Xi walked outside, then brought in a female servant. Chu Yanyu immediately recognized the servant. It was that servant of his who claimed she had witnessed the crown prince consort transform!

"I heard there's a servant in Yongfu Palace who keeps speaking nonsense," the crown prince said coldly. "Noble Lady Chu, I think you should get to the bottom of this first."

The crown prince waved his hand, and Wang Xi brought Chu Yanyu before her.

Chu Yanyu's last hope burned in his heart. He gritted his teeth. "Hong-er, didn't you say you saw the crown prince consort turn into a fish?"

"Yes," the servant called Hong-er said, smiling, "I saw it with my own eyes!"

Chu Yanyu hadn't had the chance to take a breath yet before Hong-er tilted her head and continued. "I've also seen the emperor and Noble Lady Chu turn into a fish. We're all fish, heh heh heh!"

Chu Yanyu saw that her gaze was unfocused, and the way she spoke was all over the place. His heart went cold. Hong-er had fully lost her mind!

But before, people said Hong-er was crazy because they didn't believe her. She wasn't actually crazy—Chu Yanyu knew from actually interacting with her.

It must've been the crown prince…

He'd offended the crown prince, and the crown prince was too ruthless… With this final blow, all of this had been reduced to Chu Yanyu's plot. He didn't have a single witness left to defend him.

"Noble Lady Chu, what do you think?" Mu Tianchi asked him directly. The crown prince was going to stop all the harmful rumors about Xiaoyu right here in front of the emperor.

This whole situation with Chu Yanyu wasn't entirely without benefit. Now, if anyone claimed the crown prince consort was a fish yao in the future, he'd be able to deal with them immediately.

"Your Highness…" Chu Yanyu got on his knees. The situation was far more serious than he could handle. Currently, he had nothing going for

him at all. He couldn’t continue to fight against the emperor and the crown prince.

“Noble Lady Chu.” The crown prince laughed. “Do you remember how you said if the consort was not a fish yao, I could deal with you as I saw fit?”

“Your Highness… I-I was misled by Hong-er. That’s why I said those things… Please have mercy!” Panicking in the face of his own assertions, Chu Yanyu tried to explain, stumbling over his own words.

What was he going to do? Was the crown prince going to put him in the cold palace?

The cold palace wasn’t fit for living! He didn’t want to go there! Chu Yanyu truly started to panic.

The crown prince stared down at him, and said clearly but coldly, “Two hundred strokes of the board, stripped of all status, then send him to the cold palace.”

Chu Yanyu collapsed to the floor. In his daze, he remembered he was the emperor’s concubine. How could the crown prince send him to the cold palace without asking the emperor first?

“Your Majesty, please, on account of the fact that I’ve helped you before, please save me…” Chu Yanyu begged pitifully.

He’d suffered a beating before. He knew that if he really had to go through with the two hundred strokes, he very well might end up dead. The crown prince definitely wouldn’t let him go, so he could only beg the emperor.

When the emperor heard him mention what he’d done for him, the corners of his lips slowly drooped down. Noble Lady Chu really did have

his own agenda. The emperor felt he'd been tricked and didn't want to acknowledge Chu Yanyu anymore. Instead, he ordered the guards to drag him a little farther away.

Chu Yanyu pleaded the whole way there.

Li Yu turned away, not wanting to feel any sympathy toward Chu Yanyu. If Chu Yanyu had only offended him, perhaps he would've asked the crown prince to give him a lighter punishment.

But Chu Yanyu hadn't only offended him. He'd also offended the emperor, the crown prince, and worst of all, he'd set his sights on the kids. When he witnessed the whole thing as a bystander, he could clearly see that Noble Lady Chu looked at his children with malicious intent.

Li Yu was often softhearted, but that didn't mean he didn't have a limit. His children were his boundary. No matter if Chu Yanyu was the original love interest of the book or not—there was no way he'd let him harm his kids.

Following his husband's lead, Li Yu's expression also grew cold. Regardless of what happened to Chu Yanyu, he never wanted to hear about him again.

After Noble Lady Chu was taken away, the crown prince asked the emperor for forgiveness. After all, he'd punished one of the emperor's concubines without asking—he had even tricked the emperor at the start.

But the emperor wasn't about to blame him. He was delighted that there was one less cunning concubine by his side.

"Oh right, Tianchi, your fish…" the emperor paused.

Mu Tianchi looked like he was listening respectfully, but his heart flew into his throat.

The fish body double and Xiaoyu were still subtly different. Had the emperor noticed something?

“Was… Never mind, it’s nothing,” said the emperor.

When the fish in the crystal bottle was brought into Qianqing Palace, the emperor thought the fish seemed a lot quieter than before. But it wasn’t like the crown prince’s fish didn’t have its quiet moments. Besides, Noble Lady Chu had brought a priest to challenge it. Was the fish supposed to jump for joy?

The emperor hadn’t spotted any differences in the fish. Besides, compared to Noble Lady Chu’s fake concern, this fish had truly helped him get through some tough times. The emperor himself had given the fish the title of “Number One Fish in the World.” Even he thought it would be absurd to suspect it.

“Take care of this fish. Bring it into the palace more often. I want to see what new tricks it has.”

The emperor was looking forward to it—he remembered how this fish had brought him a flower during his birthday celebration.

The crown prince and Li Yu both knew this fish had plenty of tricks up its sleeve—that was one thing the emperor could count on!

The emperor never suspected a thing, and the crown prince finally relaxed. He suddenly noticed that the crown prince consort, who was wearing a skirt, was winking at him mischievously.

…He thought the consort was kind of cute like this.

After everything was over and done with, everyone returned to the crown prince’s manor.

Li Yu kept delaying, finding excuse after excuse to keep the skirt on.

He'd never worn women's clothing before—it was a fun new experience. Besides, he'd managed to fool the emperor, so Li Yu figured his wet nurse disguise was very successful. Even with his belly, no one suspected a thing. They all just thought he was a little on the chubby side.

His high spirits remained until they returned to their bedroom. Under his husband's playful gaze, Li Yu was also in a playful mood. But he wasn't in a rush to get changed. Keeping the skirt on, he went to tease the crown prince.

"Your Highness, don't I look good like this?" Li Yu hugged the crown prince's arm, smirking.

In order to look more like a wet nurse, Li Yu had stuffed a lot of padding inside of his clothes, trying to make himself look charming. This was a rare opportunity for the crown prince to witness his extraordinary acting skills.

The crown prince, who could only feel a bunch of padding, slowly retracted his arm, not saying anything. The consort thought his plan had backfired. The crown prince was gay, so he probably didn't like this kind of thing, right…

Sob, he'd gone overboard. Wh-what if this left a lasting negative impression on his husband?!

Li Yu hurriedly took out all the padding, threw it on the floor, then went behind the silk screen to take the skirt off.

But the outfit was a little hard to remove. Li Yu had barely undone the pearl buttons on his collar when the crown prince suddenly came around and kabedoned him against the screen.

“Wet nurse?” the crown prince called out to him with a quiet laugh.

Li Yu was confused but answered anyway.

The crown prince scooped up the fish, walked out from behind the silk screen, and threw him down on the bed, carefully avoiding Li Yu’s stomach. When he kissed him, Li Yu closed his eyes, satisfied.

“Are you really a wet nurse?” the crown prince asked with a chuckle.

Li Yu’s head was starting to fill with more and more filth as he randomly nodded.

He’d given birth to the children, and he’d fed them. Of course he was a wet nurse.

And then…there was nothing after that. Wet nurse Li Yu was sucked dry by the father of his children. In the first half of the night, they were fighting and pounding; in the latter half, all that was left were sweet noises.

The couple were still in the middle of a private, passionate exchange, when someone knocked desperately on their door.

Usually, whenever they did such deeds, they would lock the door. Li Yu hurriedly wrapped the blanket around himself and glared at the crown prince…but his messy hair, teary eyes, and swollen lips didn’t hold much threat. The crown prince’s mood soared. He smiled at him indulgently, then went to open the door.

A fish baby stood outside, holding a small pillow.

“Dad,” Dabao said timidly, “I want to sleep with the wet nurse.”

The children slept on their own now, so that they wouldn’t bother their fish dad. But Dabao still wanted to sleep with his fish dad. He’d finally found an excuse.

Mu Tianchi stared down at Dabao.

How could Li Yu say no to his son? He immediately had his husband bring his son in. Dabao was very happy to be next to his fish dad. Hugging his little pillow, he willingly went to sleep between his two dads.

“Be good, Dabao, be quiet.” Dabao closed his eyes blissfully.

Li Yu threw a comforting glance at his husband. The couple lay down around their son.

Soon after, there was another knock on the door.

In that fashion, the door was knocked on four separate times. In total, there were three fish babies who wanted to sleep with the wet nurse, and one who wanted to sleep with Crown Prince Daddy.

What were they going to do? The wet nurse was dumbfounded.

“…Only this once.” The crown prince swiped at Li Yu’s nose affectionately and lay down with him, holding their babies. Everyone was finally satisfied.

I’m safe from any further essence absorbing, right? Li Yu thought carefully.

After a night of peace, the children left for the imperial study room the next morning. The crown prince went to the Ministry of Rites. When he returned, he smiled at Li Yu. “Wet nurse.”

Wet nurse Li Yu’s face went bright red, his brows ascending into his hair. *Asshole, is there any end to this?!*

Chapter 144:
Fishy in the Kitchen

THE CROWN PRINCE had dealt with Chu Yanyu, and Wang Xi and Xiaoluo had given Piaoxue several baths. Its fur had been dried several times now and it was so white it glowed. There wasn't a single dirty hair on its body and no more unpleasant smells. The crown prince had asked the servants who were in charge of royal pets to check on it multiple times. Even after they assured him the cat was fine now, the crown prince still wouldn't let Li Yu approach Piaoxue.

All because Chu Yanyu had once put black dog's blood on it. Although Li Yu had explained many times that he was not afraid of any priest or any blood, the crown prince was still worried something would happen to him.

It was very hard to convince a stubborn person, and Li Yu knew he was just trying to look out for him. If it had been something else rather than black dog's blood, the crown prince might still not have let him touch it.

Oh! Li Yu had an idea. "Then can you hold it for me?" he said.

Couples were one. If his husband held it, didn't that basically mean he held it too?

The crown prince hesitated for a moment. He'd already said no many times and knew this was Xiaoyu compromising. For his safety, as well as his happiness, he couldn't say no to this request—he agreed. Wang Xi stood to the side, a smile blossoming on his face, and handed the fluffy, white Piaoxue over to the crown prince.

After several rounds of torment, Piaoxue had long since given up any resistance. If it had dried fish, it would eat. If not, it would just lay there. Now, it was suddenly being picked up?

It found itself being pushed to a large, tall man.

“Meow!!” Piaoxue recognized this man. All its fur immediately stood on end, and it started yowling. The crown prince didn’t like Piaoxue either. He picked the cat up stiffly.

Piaoxue opened its mouth, about to bite, but the crown prince glared daggers at it, and it immediately shrunk back. With the fear the crown prince had instilled lodged deep in its heart, it stayed completely still, afraid to move, and just let the stiff, plier-like hands hold it.

The crown prince glanced at Wang Xi. Wang Xi’s smile kept twitching as he brought over a dried fish with shaking hands.

The crown prince put the dried fish near Piaoxue’s mouth, and Piaoxue didn’t dare resist: it took a few fearful bites. For the first time, the cat thought the dried fish was tasteless.

“…I fed it,” said the crown prince.

The crown prince and the cat both hated each other. With his task complete, he immediately set the cat down. Piaoxue picked up the dried fish and ran to hide behind Wang-gonggong.

Sitting in his chair, Li Yu was so amused he couldn’t even speak.

The crown prince went to bathe and change before coming back out to hug this fish who was in constant danger of suffocating from laughing too much. What was the point of holding a cat? He liked holding a fish much better.

Because of Chu Yanyu, Piaoxue stayed at the crown prince's manor for a few days, enjoying a life of luxury. It had no interest in playing with the rabbits or chasing the ducks. It just lay on the wall, sleeping and enjoying the sun.

In the end, though, it still didn't belong in the crown prince's manor. A few days later, Piaoxue disappeared again.

It must've gone to find its owner, Li Yu thought. Piaoxue hadn't known the way before, but it should now.

Li Yu asked Wang Xi to go to the cold palace to check up on Piaoxue. When Wang Xi came back, he reported Piaoxue was back by Lady Qiu's side. It was strange; when Piaoxue was at the crown prince's manor, it had seemed listless, but in the cold palace, it ran around everywhere, catching butterflies and mice, as lively as could be. Even if Lady Qiu yelled at it when she was in a bad mood, it wouldn't leave. Lady Qiu didn't have dried fish, so she could only feed Piaoxue her leftovers. But Piaoxue ate it up just the same.

Every time Wang Xi went to the cold palace, he'd bring dried fish for Piaoxue. This time was no different. When Lady Qiu found out Wang Xi had come to feed her cat, she exchanged a few words with him. Wang Xi told her that Chu Yanyu had tried to use Piaoxue to harm the crown prince consort, but that the consort didn't blame the cat.

Wang Xi originally hoped Lady Qiu would be thankful, but instead her expression grew dark. "I lead an inauspicious existence," she said coldly. "The crown prince consort's kindness is too much for me."

What she meant was that she didn't want Wang-gonggong to come back. After all, the Marquis of An and the crown prince were enemies.

There was no way to fix that relationship—Lady Qiu hated the crown prince. The reason Chu Yanyu had used Piaoxue for his scheme was because he'd noticed the crown prince manor had started taking care of Piaoxue. Now she knew what had happened, Lady Qiu no longer wanted anything to do with the crown prince manor.

Wang Xi relayed Lady Qiu's message, and Li Yu fell silent.

He remembered that when Lady Qiu had been secretly brought to the manor, she'd asked them to take care of Piaoxue. When Wang Xi first started feeding the cat, Lady Qiu hadn't stopped him. Why had she changed her tune now?

Perhaps after Piaoxue disappeared, Lady Qiu realized they were still enemies.

…Well, never mind.

Li Yu had just wanted to thank Piaoxue. It was fine if the crown prince held the cat for him, but everyone had to make a choice. If this impacted the crown prince or made things harder for him, then he could do without it.

"This is good too," Li Yu said to Wang Xi. "Piaoxue's already gone back."

Wang Xi let out a sigh of relief. He was afraid Li Yu would be unhappy. In order to lift his master's mood, Wang Xi recounted something else he saw.

"…This time, this old servant saw someone else at the cold palace," he said with a chuckle.

"Who?" asked Li Yu.

“Noble La—ha, I mean, he doesn’t have any titles anymore, he’s just a commoner. I saw him there.”

…Chu Yanyu?

Li Yu had almost forgotten about him. After Chu Yanyu was beaten and sent to the cold palace, he hadn’t asked after him at all.

Wang Xi saw that Li Yu wasn’t about to stop him, so he continued.

“I almost couldn’t recognize him. But that’s no surprise, when he’s been living somewhere like the cold palace…”

In order to survive in the palace, one needed connections—especially in a place like the cold palace, where there was no hope of leaving. For example, Lady Qiu at least had the Marquis of An outside of the palace. Although the Marquis of An was no longer in the running for the throne and there wasn’t much he could do, as long as he was still alive, it was better than nothing.

For those who truly had no support and had been rejected by the emperor for something they did, all that was left for them was a life of suffering at the hands of the servants. Those who had money could live a little better, but only a little. Those who didn’t have money just had to suffer through it.

When Chu Yanyu first arrived at the cold palace, he’d taken a few valuable things with him. But because he’d just been beaten and couldn’t move, he had to watch as most of his possessions were taken and split between the servants.

These servants were like starving wolves. When they spotted so much as a bangle, they’d smash it off his wrist and take it. Chu Yanyu

couldn’t stop them, and he still had to pay for doctors and medicines. After being scammed by a few strangers, he didn’t have much left.

There was a servant at the cold palace who knew a little about medicine. He casually checked his pulse, took away the last of his money, and gave him a few common ointments. The ointments preserved his life but couldn’t save his legs. Because he hadn’t been treated on time, his legs never healed properly. Now he walked with a limp, and the injuries from his beating never fully went away. But at least he survived.

These days, Chu Yanyu lived in a house with a half caved in roof. Every morning when he got up, the only thing he could do was stare at the sky above him with empty eyes.

If only he hadn’t tried to expose the crown prince. If only he hadn’t angered the crown prince.

If only he hadn’t entered the palace to be the emperor’s concubine.

If only he’d stuck with the crown prince from the very beginning.

If only…he’d never met the sixth prince.

Of course it was impossible to go back in time, but imagining these possibilities became Chu Yanyu’s only solace.

Just two meals were provided at the cold palace, and the head of the cold palace was in charge of them. Those who had money and outside support would obviously get better food. But Chu Yanyu had spent all his money on his injuries. He didn’t even have a piece of fabric on him that could be worth anything. As it was clear that he didn’t have anything, he was only given cold leftovers. Eating it was like chewing on candles. But he had to eat it. If he didn’t, he’d starve. After eating one meal, then another, he could go back to sleep.

On this day, he'd only had one meal when someone came looking for him.

Chu Yanyu was confused as to why anyone would think of him. He hadn't seen a single one of his servants since he entered the cold palace. Hong-er probably didn't meet a good end, but as for the rest—he'd fallen so low, so why worry about anyone else?

Although he didn't know who it was, if someone could remember him at a time like this, they might be able to help him. Chu Yanyu adjusted his unrefined robes and walked out. But what greeted him was a slap to the face that nearly made him fall over.

"Bitch! How dare you harm my cat!" Lady Qiu's eyebrows were nearly vertical as she cursed him out.

Chu Yanyu's head was buzzing, like a swarm of bees had flown by. Slowly, sounds started to get quieter and quieter. He could see Lady Qiu's lips moving, but he couldn't hear what she was saying.

To the side, a pure white cat sat on the floor, boredly licking its paws.

Lady Qiu said something, took a bottle out from her sleeve, and poured it on Chu Yanyu…

"Master, this servant is done." Wang Xi finished telling Li Yu the gossip from the cold palace.

"Wang-gonggong, are you saying Lady Qiu beat up Chu Yanyu?" Li Yu was a little confused. How did Lady Qiu find Chu Yanyu? Were the antagonists fighting each other?

Either way, the imperial consort sure was formidable! Chu Yanyu was completely weakened right now; he probably couldn't win in a fight

against her… Privately, Li Yu hoped the imperial consort would teach Noble Lady Chu a lesson. It was too gross to pour dog's blood on a cat!

"Master, not only did Lady Qiu beat him up, she even gave Chu Yanyu a small gift." Wang Xi smiled mysteriously.

It wasn't drugs or anything like that, of course. It was a bottle of dog's blood. What went around came around. If Chu Yanyu could get his hands on dog's blood, why couldn't Lady Qiu?

Chu Yanyu's beating had come from the emperor and the crown prince. The dog's blood was from Lady Qiu. They were completely different.

After Chu Yanyu was splashed with the stinking liquid, even the other denizens, who rarely bathed, would avoid him. There were no bathing facilities in the cold palace. Chu Yanyu felt he might go insane. He could only get water from the well to clean himself with, but even after many attempts, the odor remained.

"…This old servant heard that everyone in the cold palace calls him 'Walking Dog's Blood,'" Wang Xi said.

Li Yu wanted to laugh but thought that might be rude, so he could only cough a few times. He and Chu Yanyu really could've just left each other alone. But he had to provoke Li Yu. *What goes around comes around…*

Anyway, there was no need to feel like he'd stolen the crown prince away. Back when he was a fish, he'd noticed that the crown prince was not interested in Chu Yanyu. The crown prince liked him, and he liked the crown prince. He wouldn't betray the crown prince, so Chu Yanyu should have just stayed where he belonged!

Li Yu asked Wang Xi not to give him any more updates on Chu Yanyu. There were only so many hours in the day; he'd prefer to spend time with his husband and sons than waste it on irrelevant people.

His husband, the crown prince, was slowly adjusting to his work at the Ministry of Rites, and it wasn't keeping him as busy as before. But perhaps because the emperor saw how much free time the crown prince had now, he gave him another job at the Ministry of Revenue. He always seemed to be busy with something these days, but whenever he did have a moment, he'd always come back to spend time with Li Yu.

As for the children, they constantly traveled between the imperial study room and the crown prince's manor. Recently, they'd even started learning how to use chopsticks.

Li Yu was bored during his pregnancy and wanted to find something to do that was safe and interesting.

"Wang-gonggong, how about I start cooking for the children and the crown prince?"

The children had to go to the imperial study room every day. To combine studying and using chopsticks, Li Yu came up with the idea of making heart bento for the children.

After all, he'd cooked for the crown prince before! Easy-peasy!

Li Yu rubbed his hands together, prepared to give the children and their dad a surprise. The children didn't like cucumbers, but he didn't think being picky eaters was a good habit. Maybe he'd make those smashed cucumbers that their dad couldn't stop praising!

Wang Xi was horrified. He had once had the honor of tasting the crown prince consort's cooking. That taste really was indescribable. The

crown prince had ordered the entire manor to not say anything about it, so the consort never found out how bad his cooking was…

A long time had passed since then. Wang Xi had assumed that with the consort's status and the fact that he was pregnant, it wouldn't occur to him to do something like this again—but not only did it occur to him, he intended to start immediately!

The crown prince consort wanted to cook for the crown prince and the young masters. Who could stop him? He had to let the crown prince know immediately!

Chapter 145:
Fishy Kicking

LI YU GOT STARTED right away, since it wasn't like he needed any extra prep. He rolled up his sleeves and got right to it. It was just smashed cucumber; he wouldn't be dealing with oil and smoke, so his daughter wouldn't be affected.

He was already in his second trimester, and he was even sleepier than when he first got pregnant. Currently, he felt like he was as big as a cow. Forget cucumber; he thought he could smash an elephant without any problems.

Li Yu asked Auntie Xu for help again. Auntie Xu was already numb to the crown prince consort's cooking by now, and quickly got everything ready for him.

Smashing cucumber required physical labor, and Auntie Xu didn't want her pregnant master to do any work. She was about to take over…but Li Yu had already picked up the knife and was smacking it down onto the cucumber.

In a few smooth motions, the cucumber was already in pieces. Auntie Xu had no choice but to assist.

"Huh, what's this?" Li Yu found a small, unassuming jar on the corner of the stove. It looked kind of like a sugar or salt canister.

Auntie Xu took it and glanced at it before smiling. "Master, this is pepper from the south. Barely any is produced in a year, and it's worth more than its weight in gold."

Li Yu thought he'd heard wrong. Wasn't this just pepper? In his world, pepper was practically worthless. But he knew in ancient times, spices and seasonings were expensive. Perhaps pepper was more expensive than gold.

And the pepper that was more expensive than gold was just thrown into a little jar. Wasn't that pretty careless? The crown prince really was teaching him, time and time again, what it meant to be rich.

…What did ancient pepper taste like?

Li Yu sniffed the jar curiously. The taste truly hadn't changed over the last thousand years. As he was sniffing, though, he accidentally spilled quite a lot of the pepper on the cucumber.

…This pepper was more expensive than gold!!!

He couldn't let the pepper fight this battle alone! So he decided to add a few other seasonings as well.

Over in the Ministry of Rites, when Mu Tianchi received Wang-gonggong's urgent message, a tinge of warmth bloomed on his previously expressionless face.

"Your Highness, did you just receive some good news?" an official from the Ministry of Rites asked bravely. The normally cold crown prince had never seemed so approachable.

"…Mm." The crown prince nodded. Xiaoyu cooking for him was indeed a good thing.

But if he was also cooking for the children…

The crown prince paused. He had to figure out a way to stop him.

He summoned his guards and gave them some instructions, and they left in a hurry. After a while, they returned with two food boxes.

The crown prince had sent the guards back to the manor and found a way to bring all the lunches here. Since Xiaoyu wanted the lunch to be a surprise, he couldn’t let Xiaoyu know that he’d already found out. Through their own methods, and with the help of Wang-gonggong, the guards had managed to get their hands on Li Yu’s two heart bento. The consort had specified that the red one was for the children and the green one was for the crown prince.

Under the crown prince’s orders, they first brought both boxes to the Ministry of Rites. Mu Tianchi accepted both boxes, then looked inside. Then, he brought out another lunchbox that looked exactly the same, filled it with snacks that the children loved, and ordered the guards to take it to the imperial study room.

The children were so small. Instead of teaching them how to tell a kind lie without letting anything slip, he might as well just take care of it for them. To the crown prince, this was nothing at all. He didn’t like other people eating the consort’s cooking anyway, even if it was the children. He’d get jealous.

Hogging both of the lunches for himself, the crown prince sat down happily and started eating from the green box.

Each of the officials at the Ministry of Rites was cleverer than the next. When they heard the crown prince’s consort had sent lunch, they were all envious. As expected of those who worked at the Ministry of Rites. They even had their own way of complimenting the crown prince on his loving relationship.

But when they smelled the unusual scent of the cucumbers on the crown prince's plate, they gagged. What were they supposed to say?

This time, not only did the cucumbers have pepper on them, there was also a lot of star anise and fennel. But under the officials' fearful watch, the crown prince ate every last bite without so much as a change of expression.

After all of the crown prince consort's hard work, when the crown prince and children returned to the manor, they all let him know that the lunch was delicious.

The children wouldn't lie. Was the crown prince's lunch also delicious?

Li Yu felt a little unsure for some reason, but the crown prince kept smiling. Whenever he looked at him, the gentleness in his eyes was undeniable. Li Yu suddenly came to a realization: the crown prince must love pepper! He'd have to remember that.

The crown prince was shy and often conveyed his affections through his gaze. The children, however, were different.

"Dad, tastes good!" Erbao yelled loudly and made a wish: "I want it tomorrow too!"

"No problem!" Li Yu hurried to say yes. If his husband and children liked it, then that was all the validation he needed. Even though he didn't have the luck of a koi fish in the kitchen, he could learn! "Tianchi, how about I cook for you every day too?"

Li Yu wasn't the kind of man who'd forget about his husband once he had kids. He liked to take care of them all at the same time.

The crown prince hesitated. Then he smiled and said, "Okay."

Li Yu was about to shamelessly praise himself when he felt a distinct movement in his stomach. After freezing for a moment, he realized what it was, and he was so overjoyed, his tone completely changed.

“Tianchi, come quick! Sh-she kicked!”

Ever since he’d gotten pregnant with their daughter, Li Yu had been anticipating feeling her moving for a while now. But he wasn’t sure what it felt like when a baby moved in the womb. Sometimes it felt like something was blowing bubbles inside of him, like he was pregnant with a fish. But that was something only he could feel. The crown prince couldn’t experience it with him.

This was different. It was like someone had forcefully shoved at him from the inside. A vague bump protruded out from his stomach. Li Yu was one hundred percent sure this was his daughter moving. He was afraid that if he moved, she would stop moving, so he didn’t even dare blink. He just kept calling out to the crown prince.

Mu Tianchi ran over and held him, lightly hugging his stomach. Encouraged, Li Yu held his hand and placed it on his stomach.

But they waited a while, and nothing happened.

“Ah, not this time?” Li Yu jokingly apologized to him and moved the crown prince’s hand away. Just in time for her to kick again. Li Yu hurriedly put the crown prince’s hand back on his stomach, but their daughter had already stopped moving again.

Li Yu didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. Was she making fun of her father?!

As if she could feel her fish dad’s emotions, when Li Yu put the crown prince’s hand back on his stomach again, she didn’t disappoint. She

kept moving around this time.

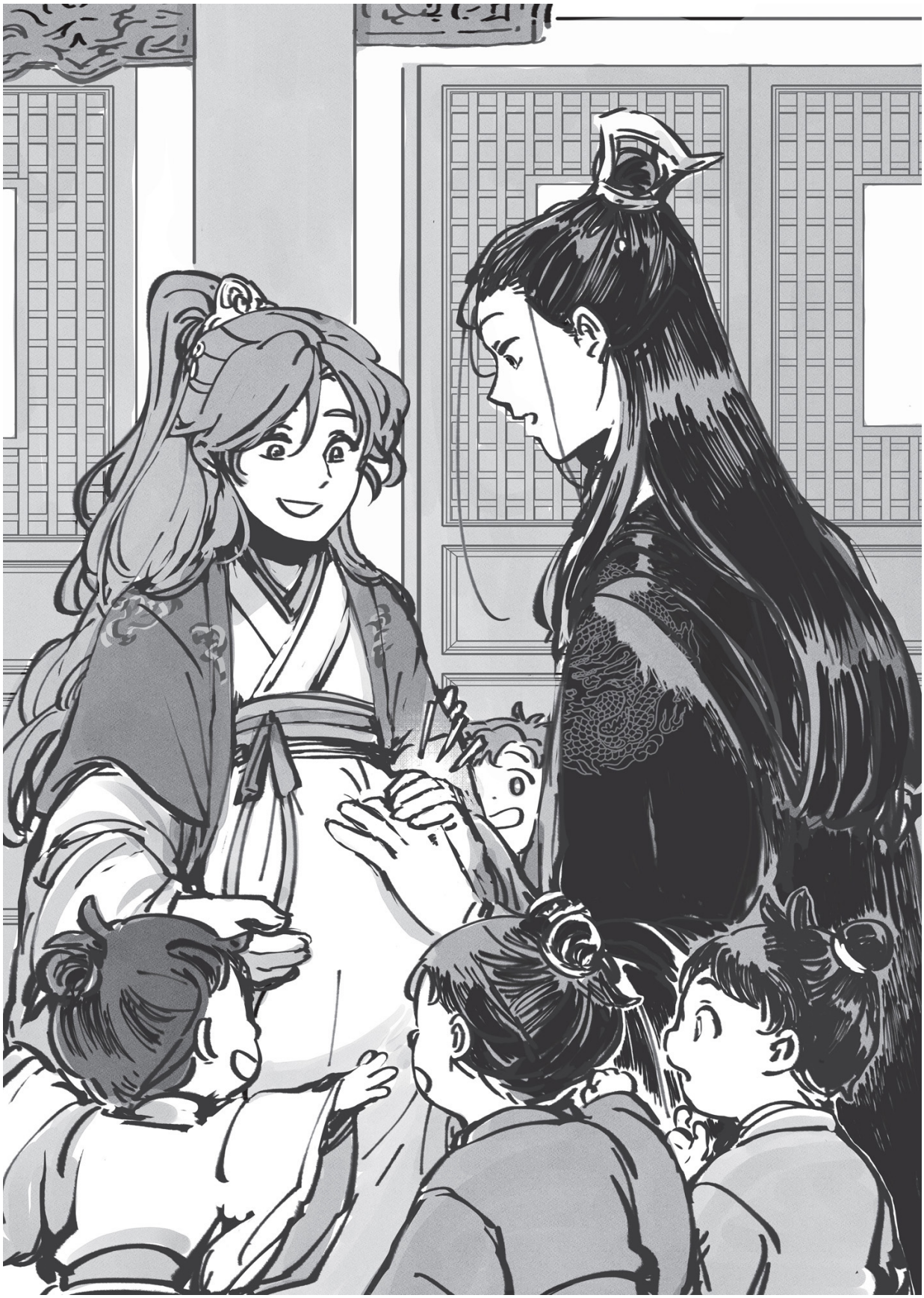
“She’s…really moving!” Very quickly, the crown prince could feel the force beneath his palm and stared incredulously at Li Yu’s stomach. “That’s our daughter!”

Li Yu nodded delightedly, extremely proud of her.

“Dad, Dad!” Dabao, Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao all gathered around. The children didn’t quite know how to express themselves. They just kept hugging Li Yu’s stomach. “Moving! She’s moving!”

Li Yu didn’t dodge the topic: he told them there was a sister in his stomach. The children all corrected themselves. “Meimei is moving!”

Watching on from a distance, Wang Xi couldn’t help but wipe away tears. Although he wasn’t sure why his masters were this emotional over the consort’s second pregnancy, he himself was overcome with emotion too, so perhaps it made sense. He didn’t know that despite already having four kids, this was Li Yu’s first time being pregnant as a human. Naturally, it was all very new.



Even the emperor was paying special attention to this pregnancy. Ever since he found out, he'd sent an imperial physician to the crown prince's manor to take the consort's pulse every day.

The next day, when the crown prince went to court, there was a blissful smile on his lips. His daughter had moved.

The emperor was a little surprised. The crown prince hadn't even been like this on the day he'd been conferred the title.

"My daughter moved," the crown prince explained when the emperor asked him about it. "I'm very happy."

When he found out, the emperor felt a little forlorn.

The first four babies had been born at the faraway western border, and the emperor hadn't been able to look after them. By the time he finally got to hold them, they were nearly a year old. With this fifth child, the emperor mused, he had to do something special.

But none of the imperial physicians were sure whether this child would be male or female. How was the crown prince so sure? The emperor figured since they already had four sons, they must really want a daughter. He heard the crown prince consort had already decided on a baby name: Xiaomian'ao.

Thinking of Dabao and the others, the emperor thought it would be great to have a granddaughter too.

When the crown prince returned to the manor that day, he brought a bunch of gifts from the emperor. The emperor had said he was only giving a few gifts, but he gave practically enough for all four children.

Normally, one ought to consider everything carefully when receiving rewards from the emperor. Since he got pregnant, though, Li Yu always

seemed to be a beat behind. He tried not to use his brain if he didn't have to.

Now that he was getting further and further along, it was harder for him to move around. When he first got pregnant, he thought he'd have ten months to slowly prepare himself. But recently he'd started feeling anxious about the birth. The Princess of Jinjue often came to see him, and she couldn't quite understand what he was worried about. In her eyes, after all, Li Yu was a miracle-worker who'd managed to give birth to quadruplets. She had no idea this was his first time.

Still, at Li Yu's request, she recounted some of her experiences. The more Li Yu heard, the more afraid he got, and he grew to be even more anxious.

After becoming pregnant, he'd always slept well. But now his fear had been giving him insomnia. For the second time that night, he flipped over with great difficulty, and the crown prince woke up.

"Xiaoyu?" The prince rubbed Li Yu's head.

Li Yu had his back to him. He was awake, but he didn't move at all. Mu Tianchi carefully flipped the fish back over and found his face was covered in snot and tears.

Mu Tianchi immediately hugged him, worried. "What is it?"

Li Yu buried his face in his chest. "I-I'm scared suddenly." He froze, as though he'd reached breaking point, and then started to sob out loud.

It wasn't that he didn't want this child. He'd truly grown to love Xiaomian'ao. When she first started moving, he had been the happiest one there. But his fear was real too. He was about to face an unfamiliar peril he had to experience all by himself, and he was afraid.

His tears had nothing to do with whether or not he was strong. He had to let his emotions out in order to conquer his fear…

Li Yu kept on encouraging himself. He could do it.

He wanted to push away the prince and tell him not to worry. People were more sensitive during pregnancy. He'd been easy to anger before, so perhaps he was just easy to cry now.

Was he trying to run away at the last minute?

This was a little dramatic. Even he was judging himself.

"I'm fine, I'm just a little emotional," Li Yu sobbed.

But the crown prince didn't leave just because he told him to. He continued to hold him, gently patting him on the back. "Xiaoyu, if you want to cry, just let it out," he soothed him quietly. "Don't force yourself." Li Yu had already calmed down quite a lot, but with these words, he started crying again.

The crown prince couldn't do anything to help. Li Yu knew he hated how helpless he was in this circumstance.

Pregnancy really was difficult, both physically and mentally. Li Yu wanted to complain. It was clearly their shared child, so why was he the only one suffering? He pouted, still unhappy. The crown prince lifted his sleeve and exposed his arm.

"If you're unhappy," he said in a low voice, "just bite me."

Li Yu looked for a fleshy spot, and then he really did bite down savagely without letting go.

The crown prince didn't even furrow his brows. After Li Yu was done, he held him tightly. "Unfortunately, that pain is nothing compared to

yours," he said, his heart aching. "Don't be afraid… I'll protect you."

Li Yu, who had already cried far too much, felt his eyes turning red again. But hearing that from the crown prince—and taking a bite out of him—really did make him feel better.

"I-I'm okay now—don't worry," he said hoarsely.

Sometimes, his fear felt like it filled him up entirely. But as long as he could remember how much he was loved, even his greatest fear could be chased away.

Chapter 146:
Fishy Birth of a Daughter

ALTHOUGH THE EMPEROR had already announced Mu Tianchi as the crown prince, the ceremony hadn't been held yet.

The Ministry of Rites was in charge of the ceremony. In order to satisfy the emperor and crown prince, the Ministry of Rites and the Imperial Astrological Bureau had picked out a few auspicious dates for the emperor to choose from.

Now that the emperor had discovered what it felt like to make the crown prince do the hard work, he gave the crown prince more and more responsibilities. As such, he also asked the crown prince for his thoughts on the ceremony. To his surprise, the crown prince picked the latest date: half a year from now.

Although Prince Jing's manor was now the Crown Prince Manor and everyone referred to it as such, there was still one remaining step. The ceremony was the last part of the procedure and couldn't be avoided.

The emperor hadn't expected the crown prince to be so patient. But then he remembered the crown prince consort was due in a couple of months and felt like he understood. All of these dates were suggested by the Ministry of Rites, anyway, so it was fine. With more time, they would be able to make better preparations. If the crown prince wanted that date, there was no reason for the emperor to deny him, so he readily agreed.

Li Yu secretly let out a sigh of relief when he found out the crown prince's ceremony would be held after he gave birth.

His belly was growing heavier and heavier, but as the crown prince's consort, he had to attend the crown prince's ceremony. Apparently, the ceremony involved making sacrifices to the heavens; there was no way it would take less than a day. It would be very hard for him to make it through the entire thing.

In preparation, Li Yu had steeled himself and asked Wang Xi to help make him many soft cushions, just in case. He was thrilled to learn that he wouldn't have to use them after all.

The crown prince wasn't the type to ask for thanks; as long as Li Yu was happy, so was he. But when Wang Xi found out what he was hiding, he really wanted to tell the consort. If the crown prince wasn't going to say anything, Wang-gonggong would reveal it to the consort secretly: the date that he had picked wasn't originally in the Ministry of Rites' consideration, since they were afraid the prince wouldn't want to wait so long. The crown prince had been working at the Ministry of Rites for a while now. He was the one who went to the minister to add the date, and he was the one who convinced the emperor to choose this date.

When Wang Xi revealed the truth, Li Yu's delight turned into gratitude.

The crown prince had to go through this ceremony to truly become the crown prince, so it was obvious how important it was for him. Li Yu was determined to go through with it no matter what. But the crown prince was willing to delay such an important ceremony for him, just so he could feel more comfortable. Even though the crown prince couldn't share the pain of childbirth, he had still done a lot for him.

In turn, Li Yu was willing to be a little braver for the crown prince's sake. If the birthing process was truly painful, he'd just take a few more bites after the fact to get back at him.

The due date slowly approached, and Li Yu wasn't so scared anymore. His stomach grew larger and larger, which meant Xiaomian'ao was growing larger and larger too.

Halfway through the ninth month, Li Yu's stomach was so large he couldn't see his feet. It was just like a ball. Before, Li Yu had still been able to cook his heart bento, but he didn't dare cook anymore. Even if he *had* dared, the crown prince wouldn't let him, so that was the end of the bentos.

With his stomach so heavy, not only was his movement restricted, he couldn't sleep well either. It was all right during the night, but it was really difficult to take his afternoon naps now. When the crown prince found out, he would attend court every morning, then rush back home to eat lunch and take a nap with Li Yu. He'd leave again once Li Yu fell asleep. Li Yu felt a little more comfortable when he could snuggle with him.

Xiaoluo was the kind of person who just couldn't sit still, always wanting to help out her masters. "It's not sustainable for His Highness to keep running back and forth like this," she said privately to Madam Qin. "Let's make a big cushion for the master."

Madam Qin smiled. "Do you think the crown prince hasn't thought of that?" His Highness practically wanted to dote on the master even more, so how could he find it tiring? Xiaoluo was a young lady, so she only barely understood what Madam Qin meant. In the same meaningful tone Wang Xi had spoken to her before, she said to Xiaoluo, "You'll understand in the future."

Xiaoluo nodded, red-faced.

Time flew by. One day, Li Yu woke up to a sore back, but he hadn't yet reached the ten month mark,[6] so he didn't pay it much mind. After breakfast, he usually took a walk in the yard. Wang Xi cleaned the yard personally every day so that there wasn't even a single speck of dust.

With the help of Xiaoluo and a few other servants, Li Yu walked around for a little bit. For some reason, his legs were also abnormally tired. He'd only taken a few steps when he found he was too tired to continue.

He didn't dare push himself, so he sat down on a chair at once. When he got up again, he stumbled, but luckily Xiaoluo caught him.

Li Yu's heart was jumping in his chest. Although he hadn't fallen, everything still felt a little off.

Xiaoluo knew a bit about medicine. After checking Li Yu's pulse, she hurriedly asked him to sit and called for someone to fetch a doctor. With his due date approaching, the crown prince had brought in a doctor to live in the manor, and this doctor arrived on the scene at the same time as the imperial physicians who visited every day. Together, they checked Li Yu's pulse, and they all agreed: the baby was coming.

Wang Xi sent for the midwives, and after the imperial physician's confirmation, he ran off to find the crown prince.

Li Yu had only thought he'd suffered a shock! Sob sob sob, was Xiaomian'ao that desperate to come out? Was he going to give birth *right now*?

The crown prince had picked out three midwives with carefully verified backgrounds early on, and the delivery room was constantly prepped and ready. When the midwives received the news, they ran over

and looked at Li Yu's stomach. Although they didn't have any experience with a man giving birth, the crown prince consort had told them it was roughly the same as for women. With a little more confidence, they calmly ordered the servants to boil water and prepare food.

Even though labor had started, there was still some time before he actually had to push. The midwife asked Li Yu to eat as much as he could manage and to walk a bit more. It would help the birthing process.

He'd heard the Princess of Jinjue recount this process several times. Now that the midwife was here, he felt a little pain in his stomach.

It wasn't very sharp—more of a dull pain. After a certain point, it really started to ache, but he could still endure it. After a while, the soreness would die down.

The midwife told him that everyone's birthing experience was different. Some people felt pain, some would have sore backs. When the pain became more frequent, it would be time to push. Li Yu was well aware of these steps.

Xiaoluo came over and handed Li Yu a small bowl of freshly made har gow. Li Yu was in a good state; he could pick up the spoon and eat it himself. Faced with Xiaoluo's worried expression, Li Yu even managed to joke around. Previously, he had been anxious, but now that the time came, he felt calm instead. No matter how fearful he was, he had to give birth! He might as well just go for it!

The crown prince must already be on his way. Li Yu wanted to see his husband. He felt a little bit like crying.

He wished for the crown prince to return, but he didn't expect him to be back so quickly. When he showed up, Li Yu hadn't even finished his

bowl of har gow. There was half a dumpling in his mouth, making his cheek protrude, and he was in the middle of chewing.

When the crown prince entered, Li Yu was shocked and dropped the other half of his har gow.

“Xiaoyu!” The crown prince ignored everyone else, rushed over, and swept Li Yu up into his arms. Xiaoluo and Wang Xi stepped to the side smartly and pretended to be part of the scenery.

Li Yu hugged him tightly. “Tianchi! I’m about to give birth!”

To be honest, Li Yu had still been a little afraid. Now that the crown prince was here, though, he’d gained some courage.

“Don’t be afraid… I’m here with you,” the crown prince said gently and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

Li Yu nodded, belatedly realizing that the crown prince, who was always as calm and steady as a mountain, had become very pale and his hands were trembling slightly. He looked even more nervous than Li Yu, who was the one about to go into battle.

Li Yu was touched but also found it funny. “Your Highness,” he teased, “did you ask permission to leave?”

“…I forgot.” When the crown prince received the news that Li Yu was going into labor, he didn’t even have time to tell the minister before rushing back home.

Li Yu burst out laughing.

Taking the bowl, the crown prince fed Li Yu a few more har gow and a piece of peach blossom pastry.

It had calmed down for a while, but now Li Yu's stomach started to hurt again. This time, it was worse than before, and it ached more too. He couldn't speak. He bit on his lip harshly, trying to endure the pain.

The crown prince pulled up his sleeve and brought his arm before Li Yu. Li Yu shook his head, eyes red. His husband had come to see him—he didn't feel like biting him right now.

After the pain passed, the midwife asked Li Yu to walk a little more. Li Yu's legs felt weak from the pain, but he had no choice. Xiaoluo came over to support him, but the crown prince said, "Let me."

Hugging Li Yu, he let him lean against him, and they walked like that, very slowly. Li Yu's clothes were already soaked through with sweat, but he felt like he could still endure it.

Li Yu sat down to take a break when the pain got worse, then continued his walk when it passed. This cycle continued for a while, during which the midwife came a few times to feel Li Yu's stomach. Finally, she said, "We can move to the delivery room."

"…I have to go," Li Yu said in a low voice. He puckered his lips with great difficulty, wanting one last victory kiss.

The crown prince kissed him on the lips, then held his hand and said, "Let's go."

Li Yu felt unhappy with how decisive the crown prince seemed. It didn't feel like he was reluctant to let him go at all. But soon he found out why.

The crown prince didn't hand him over to the midwife. Instead, he followed him into the delivery room.

Following the midwife's instructions, he lay down on the bed, thinking that *now* it was time to say goodbye to the prince. But the crown prince had no intention of leaving. He stayed planted by the bed.

The midwives bustled around them, completely ignoring the crown prince as if they had been instructed beforehand.

"You—" *Why aren't you leaving?* Li Yu couldn't believe it.

In the ancient past, delivery rooms were bloody and considered unclean. Few men ever entered, and especially not those with higher status. But the crown prince had been here for a while now.

"Xiaoyu, don't be afraid," he repeated. "I'm here with you."

Li Yu finally understood what the crown prince meant. He closed his eyes and nodded, letting his tears stream down his face.

He took a deep breath. Even if he had to face hell itself, he wouldn't be afraid. No matter how long the pain lasted, there would always be a pair of hands holding him tightly, giving him the courage and strength to continue on.

Li Yu tried to follow the midwife's instructions. Before he passed out from exhaustion, he thought he heard the system, a baby crying, and a familiar voice…

An unknown length of time later, he opened his eyes and found himself surrounded by light. The system appeared before him.

Thinking back, he'd passed out from exhaustion. Was he in the system now?

But he was still in the middle of labor. Was Xiaomian'ao all right? And the crown prince was still waiting for him!

‹…User, please don’t worry,› the system told him. *‹You have successfully completed the “Warm Cotton Jacket” side quest. Your daughter has been added to your team.›*

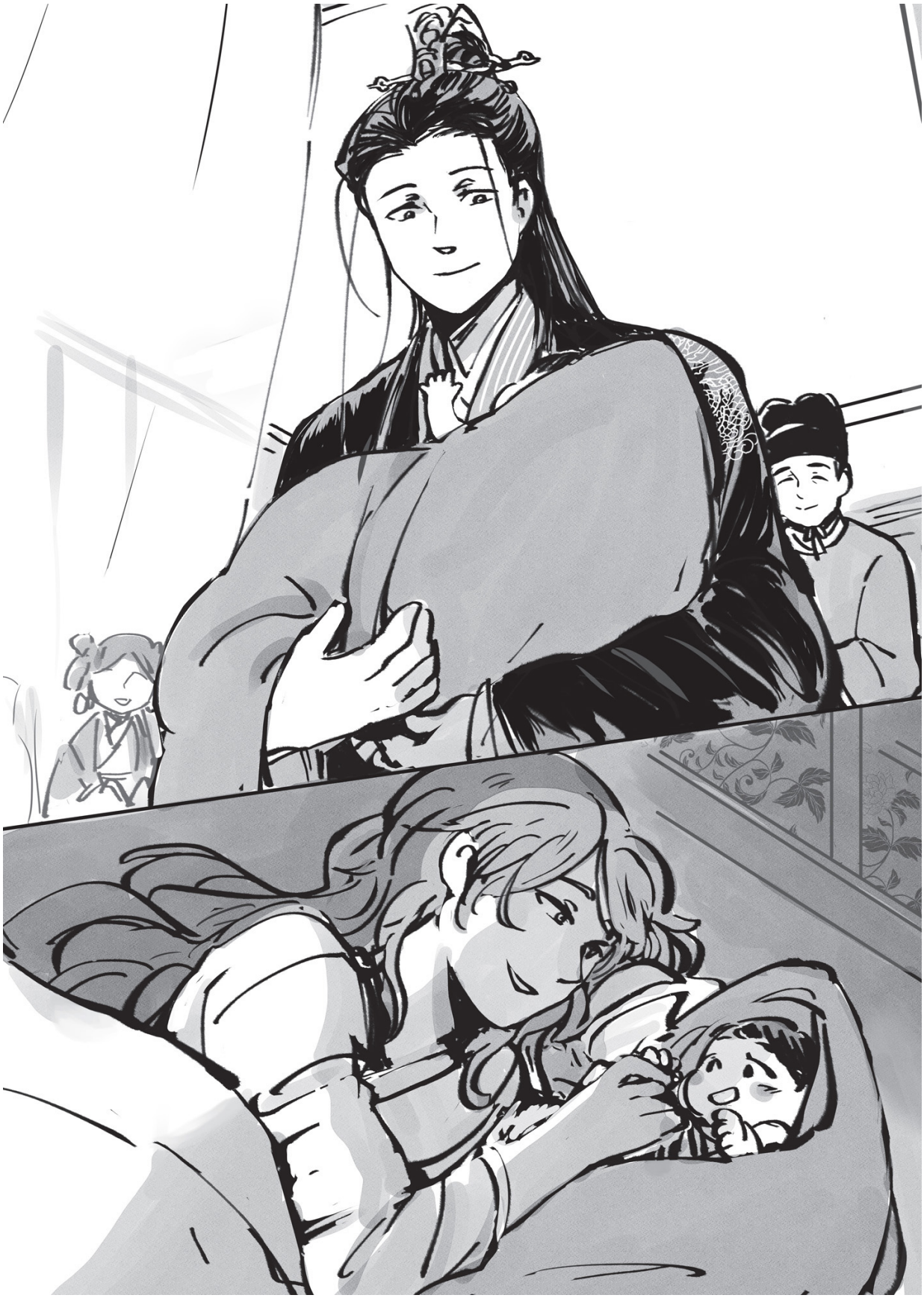
Ha, was he finally done giving birth?

As expected of me! he thought smugly. He seemed to have already forgotten the pain.

Though Xiaomian’ao had been born as a human baby and not a fish, she could still be seen from “Fish Children Status.” Li Yu hurried to check on her and saw Xiaoluo and Madam Qin wiping a round, pink baby with a thick head of hair.

Li Yu’s heart nearly melted. This was his and the crown prince’s daughter.

He had really taken care of himself properly during this pregnancy. Xiaomian’ao was a newborn, but her skin wasn’t wrinkly, and she was very rosy. As Li Yu watched, the baby suddenly opened her round eyes and stared into the air, as though looking right at Li Yu. It was like she knew he was looking at her.



Li Yu covered his mouth and smiled.

This baby was like him, and also like Mu Tianchi. It was clear this was their child. He watched her for a while, unable to look away, until he couldn't anymore.

The system reminded Li Yu to accept his reward. He finally turned away reluctantly to look at something else.

This time, the reward was very interesting: increased healing and decreased pain from childbirth.

What's the point in giving me this now? I've already gone through the worst of the pain. The system sure was slow.

The system, who knew everything the user was thinking, said: *‹If the user is unhappy with the reward, do you want to cancel it?›*

…Noooooo! It was better than nothing! Even if it was late, he'd take as little pain as he could get!

Li Yu exited the system, but this time, it was really hard to wake up. His eyelids were so heavy he couldn't open them. In the system, he was comfortable and relaxed. Outside of the system, he could feel how weak he was. He was glad he'd accepted the reward. He was still in pain, but it was much better than giving birth had been. His throat was so dry, it felt like it was on fire.

Li Yu looked around. The room was dark, with a single candle on the desk. He could recognize this as the bedroom.

Someone had cleaned him up and moved him here.

He cleared his throat, wanting to call for someone, when someone called out to him first. "Xiaoyu…"

Li Yu couldn’t have been more familiar with that hoarse voice. He was surprised and delighted all at once. It was dark in the room, so he hadn’t noticed Mu Tianchi at first and thought he was alone—but the other man had never left his side. He’d been here the whole time, waiting for him to wake up.

“Xiaoyu.” Mu Tianchi wouldn’t let him get up. He fed him a cup of warm tea, then called the imperial physicians in to take Li Yu’s pulse.

The physicians had already checked Li Yu over once while he was unconscious. The crown prince ordered them to check again, and they confirmed that the crown prince consort was fine.

Li Yu stared at the open doorway. “What about Xiaomian’ao?” He’d already seen his daughter in the system, but he’d never held her.

Mu Tianchi chuckled. “They’re cleaning her up, just wait a moment.”

Soon, Wang Xi brought over a baby swaddled in pink. The crown prince accepted her, then brought the baby over to Li Yu.

Li Yu touched his daughter’s hand, staring at her rosy cheeks. She really did look exactly the same as she had in the system. Fish Dad kissed his daughter’s face, satisfied.

Li Yu was still exhausted. Staying awake had taken a lot of his energy, and he soon fell back to sleep. Mu Tianchi covered his consort and daughter up with the blanket and kissed both their foreheads.

Footsteps could be heard outside. The children were here.

“Dad, Dad!” they called out.

They had been studying in the imperial study room during the day. After they found out Li Yu was about to give birth, the emperor kept them

in Qianqing Palace for a few extra hours. He'd only let them return home just now, in case the crown prince and his consort were busy.

"Shh…" Mu Tianchi stopped the children quietly. "Daddy is tired, don't wake him."

The children nodded, promising not to be loud, and the crown prince let them in. Dabao, Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao tiptoed over to surround their fish dad.

First, they looked at their sister. She really was so small, even smaller than the meimei at their uncle's house. Then they looked at Fish Dad, who was deeply asleep.

"We'll wait for Dad and Meimei," the children said happily.

Chapter 147:
One-Month-Old Fish Mei

THE CROWN PRINCE had a daughter.

When they heard the news, many of the court officials thought it was unfortunate. If it had been a son, it would've been the first little royal grandson after he became the crown prince, which would've been very meaningful. A son surely would have been doted on by the emperor and crown prince, but since it was a daughter, it was hard to say.

Li Yu also heard similar rumors, but he didn't pay them any mind.

People in ancient times were sexist, but as long as he wasn't, it would be fine. Boy or girl, both were good. Plus, Xiaomian'ao was very meaningful to them; she was their only daughter.

As for the crown prince himself, Li Yu often saw him holding Xiaomian'ao, staring at her for a long time, unwilling to let go. Because Li Yu needed to recover, the crown prince took care of everything for Xiaomian'ao. How could anyone think for a second that he didn't adore her? If he could have wrapped her up in bubble wrap, he'd still worry about her getting bruises.

The crown prince's affection for his daughter didn't stop there. When he first found out Li Yu was pregnant with a daughter, he'd prepared many names. After she was born, though, he didn't think any of them were suitable. He'd been struggling for a few days now, but he still couldn't make a decision.

Even the decisive crown prince could suffer from indecision, it seemed! In the end, Li Yu picked out the characters “Qiongxue” from a thick stack of names.[7] Two days after Xiaomian’ao was born, her rosy skin became pale, as glossy as jade. This ethereal name was perfect for her.

Now that they’d figured out her name, they needed a nickname.

Li Yu had made a decision back when he was incubating the fish roe. He was going to continue what he had started with Dabao, Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao. Xiaomian’ao was number five, so she should rightfully be “Wubao,” but Li Yu wanted to show off his beautiful daughter. Taking her name into consideration, he decided to call her “Xuebao.”

The crown prince read it out loud a few times. He quite liked it. Dabao and the others quickly followed suit, clapping their hands.

“You’ll be older brothers from now on,” Fish Dad instructed his sons, “so you have to take care of Xuebao, understand?”

The children all nodded, each bringing out their favorite toys to give to Xuebao. Li Yu burst out laughing. It would be a long time before their sister could play with these toys.

When he found out the crown prince consort had given birth to a daughter, the emperor also showered them in gifts. Because Xuebao was a newborn, she couldn’t go outside, so the emperor dressed in common clothing and made a trip to the Crown Prince Manor especially to see his granddaughter. As far as Li Yu could remember, he’d never done that before.

The emperor wasn’t expecting at all to see something like the confession that was engraved into the wall, and he shot the crown prince a

derisive glance. Finding out that the entire manor had been turned into a giant fish tank came as much less of a shock in comparison.

The crown prince brought Xuebao out for the emperor to see. As soon as he held her, he didn't want to let go. Xuebao wasn't shy either; she stared curiously at the emperor with her dark, round eyes. The emperor was so happy, he gifted Xuebao a piece of warm jade Empress Xiaohui used to wear.

Xuebao was an infant, so she often had to be fed and changed. The emperor personally handed Xuebao to Madam Qin and reminded her to be careful. Madam Qin was nearly scared witless.

Staring at his daughter, who was like the moon being held up by a sky full of stars, Li Yu thought of those rumors. Those people outside had no idea!

The emperor was never shy when it came to his grandchildren. He'd given titles to Li Yu and the crown prince's sons, and the Cheng'en-shizi and the Princess of Jinjue's daughter was given the title of junzhu. Now it was this granddaughter's turn. The daughter of a crown prince should have the title of junzhu, but if he left it at that, the emperor thought, that would put her on the same level as Qinghe-junzhu. Qinghe-junzhu was technically a subject; how could they hold the same title? Disregarding all principles, the emperor decided to make Xuebao a princess and give her a title.

The crown prince and his consort had picked Xuebao's name and nickname, but the emperor refused to lose to them and picked out Xuebao's title. Usually, princesses were given titles upon marriage, but the emperor had picked one out for the little princess ahead of time.

He'd spent a long time thinking about it.

The crown prince's daughter, Qiongxue, was given the title of Princess Wenhui.[8]

Staring at their swaddled daughter, Li Yu and the crown prince both simultaneously felt the sadness that Ye Qinghuan had mentioned when considering their daughter's future wedding.

Her title included the same "hui" as Empress Xiaohui's title. This both represented the wisdom the emperor wanted his little granddaughter to embody, as well as a nod to his beloved empress.

Li Yu's original plan had been to dote on his daughter as if she were a princess, but when he heard she'd officially become a princess already, he was a little speechless. But even if the emperor hadn't given her that title, he supposed it would have been hers anyway once her father ascended to the throne.

He'd thought Dabao was a real koi before, but the little princess's luck could give Dabao a run for his money.

The officials fought against the emperor's decision at court the next morning: Xuebao was a girl and the crown prince's daughter. But the emperor refused to budge, so that was how things worked out.

Some tried to convince the crown prince to refuse on his daughter's behalf, but he ignored them. This was what the emperor wanted to do, and Xiaoyu's daughter definitely deserved to hold the title of princess.

The people who'd originally wanted to make fun of the crown prince consort for giving birth to a daughter suddenly realized he was still being showered with love anyway. At Xuebao's one month celebration, the crown prince practically invited half the city. Even the emperor came, and after that celebration, no one dared to suggest the little princess wasn't doted on.

Although the birthing process had been terribly painful, Li Yu healed very quickly with the benefit of the system. The midwife predicted it'd take him about a month to recover, but it only took Li Yu a couple of weeks.

Unfortunately, he was still forced to suffer through postpartum confinement.

In ancient times, people believed that in the first month after birth, one had to avoid the wind and cold, as well as bathing. In the month after giving birth to little Xuebao, swimming and bathtime—both things he didn't care for much before—became luxuries he could only dream about. He'd recovered long ago, but the crown prince, ever careful, wanted him to rest for a whole month. How could he survive not touching water for a whole month?!

And Li Yu still had to turn back into a fish once a day. But the crown prince was better at keeping track of the time than he was. Li Yu wanted to sneak into the water for a bit when he transformed, but the crown prince mercilessly blocked any chance of that. He confiscated all his fish tanks and crystal bottles, only leaving him a wet cloth. After flopping around on the cloth, he'd have to return to human form…

As time went on, Li Yu thought he'd turned into a filthy loach.

More than once, he complained about how gross he felt. After consulting the midwife and imperial physicians, the crown prince started wiping Li Yu's face with a warm cloth, but it was barely any use. It wasn't getting to the root of the problem.

To try and keep him calm, the crown prince wiped his entire body down himself. Li Yu resisted a few times before just giving in. The crown

prince had seen him at his worst anyway—the prince still had his bite marks on the back of his hand. So what if he helped him get through this month?

On the day he was finally free, Li Yu dragged the crown prince off to take a four-hour bath with him. After his wash, the loach turned back into a squeaky-clean man.

At Xuebao's one month celebration, Li Yu and the crown prince wore matching robes in dark red brocade. Dabao, Erbao, Sanbao, and Sibao all wore little golden robes embroidered with fishes and the word "luck," and Xuebao wore a little dress dotted with red plum blossoms. There were two tiny pigtails atop her head, tied with ribbons that matched her dress. She looked like a little fairy.

Now that the crown prince had a daughter, the entire Cheng'en family came to congratulate him. When the old Duke of Cheng'en, Ye Qian, saw his great granddaughter, his steps became lighter. After he held her, he couldn't stop smiling. He took out a somewhat old necklace, placing it around Xuebao's neck.

Xuebao didn't understand anything. She accidentally tugged on Ye Qian's beard, but he wasn't angry. Instead, he burst out laughing.

The Princess of Jinjue and Ye Qinghuan brought their daughter too. When they saw Xuebao, they told Li Yu he was doing a good job taking care of her.

Qinghe-junzhu was just starting to walk. She toddled over to the younger girl and kissed her on the cheek. Dabao and the others were particularly naughty, picking all of the flowers in the garden. They picked the prettiest flowers to make into flower crowns and put one on each of the girls' heads.

Li Yu desperately wished he had a camera so he could save this heartwarming moment. A little later, though, when he was changing back in his room, he saw an unfinished painting on the desk. The painting was of the two families meeting: a group of cute children surrounding two young girls wearing flower crowns. They all had rosy cheeks, smiling like flowers. The painting was unfinished, but it was clearly the crown prince's work. The prince's painting skills were excellent: no matter whether his subjects were people or inanimate objects, they all looked very real.

Li Yu loved this painting dearly, and was thinking of asking his husband if he could have it when he noticed the words in the corner: *for Xiaoyu.*

So, it had been for him all along. Li Yu was thrilled. He'd accidentally discovered the crown prince's gift for him, so he'd just have to pretend he hadn't seen anything.

He glanced around. Other than the painting on the table, there was also that painting of their family of six on the wall.

No, now it was a family of seven.

Li Yu suddenly realized that a little koi fish dotted with red had appeared among the group of fish. It was very similar to what Xuebao had worn today. Clearly, that was the crown prince's work as well.

Although the crown prince and Xuebao weren't fish, they were still here with everyone else as fish.

Li Yu smiled at the two paintings, lost in happiness. His reverie was interrupted when Wang Xi called out to him from outside, saying the Marquis of Dingbei had brought a gift for him.

Wang Xi's words sounded a little strange. There had been plenty of gifts given at the celebration, but nobody had mentioned who each gift had come from before. Besides, the Marquis of Dingbei…

Li Yu was already the crown prince consort, but he couldn't keep track of all the nobility in the capital. The crown prince never forced him to remember either. Wang Xi said the gift-giver had been from the Marquis of Dingbei's household, but he couldn't remember who that was…

Li Yu put the painting back and went to see Wang Xi, who was waiting with a silk handkerchief in his hand. When he saw Li Yu, he unwrapped it, revealing a small, very delicate silver bracelet intended to protect the wearer.

When Wang Xi received this gift, he had also been confused, but he had also been very careful, wiping the bracelet inside and out many times. He'd even kept it on himself for a while, and only came to find Li Yu once he was certain there were no problems with it whatsoever.

Spotting the word "Liang" on the handkerchief, Li Yu realized who had sent it.

No wonder he'd thought the Marquis of Dingbei sounded familiar. Those were the in-laws of the late sixth prince Mu Tianxiao; Li Yu had once helped Mu Tianxiao's wife, Lady Liang.

After he held her hostage, Lady Liang lost any faith she still had in her husband, and she'd lost the child in her belly too. After that, she moved back in with her family. When Mu Tianxiao was working with Princess Langya, he never once spared a thought for his wife. This was fortunate, though, as it meant that when the emperor was clearing the palace of

Loulan forces, the Marquis of Dingbei—who had close ties with Mu Tianxiao—wasn't affected.

Lady Liang hadn't managed to divorce Mu Tianxiao before his death, and so she had become a widow. She lived in the countryside and never left the house.

When she heard the crown prince consort had given birth to a daughter and that the daughter was now one month old, she wanted to give a gift to show her gratitude. But since she was still in mourning, it was inappropriate for her to appear at a celebration, as it might be inauspicious, so this was the only way she could show her thanks.

Her child had been a daughter too. But she hadn't been able to keep her. She hoped the crown prince consort's child would always be safe.

Li Yu put Lady Liang's gift away carefully. When he thought about her situation, he was very sympathetic. When Mu Tianxiao was alive, he barely cared for Lady Liang. Now that he was dead, she still had to mourn for him? Apparently Lady Liang was even younger than he was. And she had to spend the rest of her days as a widow?

Li Yu was a modern person; he thought living as a widow seemed like a rather cruel fate. Was there any way he could help Lady Liang escape the shadow of Mu Tianxiao?

Chapter 148:
Married for a Hundred Lives

LI YU ASKED Madam Qin about the life of a widow. In the current dynasty, women didn't remarry after their husbands died, as remaining a widow was seen as virtuous. Although it wasn't required by law, the court rewarded women who didn't remarry. There were, of course, those who remarried anyway, but those women were often looked down on and judged, shunned by those around them.

Lady Liang's situation was even more complicated and difficult. Ordinary women who didn't care about their reputation could remarry, but that wasn't a possibility for Lady Liang. Even though the sixth prince had been written out of the royal family, Lady Liang was still considered part of the royal family. The emperor would never allow the previous consort of a prince to remarry. Besides, Lady Liang's marriage to Mu Tianxiao had been ordered by the emperor. If she tried to remarry, it could be seen as going against the emperor's orders.

The emperor hated Mu Tianxiao, and he'd never checked on Lady Liang either. Though the Marquis of Dingbei was Lady Liang's family, if she lived there long-term, people would start talking. So in order not to drag down her parents, Lady Liang moved to the countryside. Even so, she was still glared at whenever she left the house.

"Do you want to find her a new marriage?" Madam Qin asked, smiling.

One didn't usually ask after widows without a reason. Madam Qin had an older sister who had been married before. Because her husband died

of illness, she was well aware of how much widows suffered. Later she'd remarried, despite the disapproval of everyone around her. In her own words, being a widow was a fate worse than death. It was a good thing her sister had remarried; she was now doing well away from the capital, and often came to visit Madam Qin.

Because of her sister's experience, Madam Qin supported the idea of Lady Liang remarrying. She thought Li Yu wanted to find Lady Liang a new husband.

Li Yu froze. What remarriage? What?

If Lady Liang and Mu Tianxiao had had a good relationship and Lady Liang wanted to remain a widow for his sake, that would be none of Li Yu's business. But it was clear that Lady Liang couldn't have been more disappointed in Mu Tianxiao. She only remained a widow because she was being held hostage by social etiquette.

There were plenty of fish in the sea. Why did a perfectly good person have to remain loyal to this long dead one?

When a husband lost his wife, nobody expected those men to remain widowers. Everyone thought men needed to be taken care of. Men remarrying was reasonable, but a woman remarrying would be judged for her whole life. Talk about double standards.

But Li Yu had never thought about Lady Liang remarrying. Mu Tianxiao was dead, so she no longer had any ties to him. She should live the kind of life she wanted.

Li Yu shook his head. "I'm not going to try to be a matchmaker."

He just wanted Lady Liang to escape Mu Tianxiao's shadow. If she wanted to remarry, she could. If she wanted to live a quiet, peaceful life, she

could do that too.

Li Yu wanted to help Lady Liang, but he wasn't quite sure how exactly to go about it. If he went to ask the crown prince for help, though, he'd definitely think of something for him—after all, the two of them were deeply in love! Li Yu was unreasonably confident.

When Li Yu shared his thoughts with Madam Qin, she sighed. "Lady Liang would be very lucky to receive your help. But I don't know if she will accept…"

A widow completely cutting ties with her husband's family was almost unheard of. It required a great deal of bravery to withstand the insults. When Madam Qin's sister first remarried, her neighbors and relatives had pointed their fingers at her and accused her of not being a virtuous woman. After her second marriage, she left her hometown with her husband, and that was how she was able to face her new life with ease.

Li Yu hadn't even considered this. Might Lady Liang reject his help? He decided to send Madam Qin to find out how Lady Liang felt.

The response he received was that Lady Liang didn't want to change anything about her current situation. When asked why, she said, "People's words are to be feared."

As Mu Tianxiao's wife, she could continue to live in peace, even if she was alone. As herself, she would have to face insults and judgment from all sides. That wasn't something that could be fixed by just changing someone's identity. An entire group of people had to change.

All the arrangements Li Yu had wanted to make for Lady Liang went down the drain. There was no need to discuss it with the crown prince, then…

No, he still had to go. Perhaps Lady Liang didn't need the help, but that didn't mean other women wouldn't. This was a societal issue, not a personal one. If he could change one tiny thing in this world, even if it was just a bit more empathy for widows, that was still worth something.

Li Yu ran off to look for the crown prince, but he couldn't find him anywhere. As he approached, he found a group of guards surrounding the prince's study.

When Li Yu asked them what was going on, they told him that apparently the crown prince was discussing something top secret with Ye-shizi. Li Yu was about to leave, but the guard said the crown prince had given orders to not let anyone in except the consort.

What did that mean??

Did that mean he could go inside without a problem?

Since the crown prince didn't want him to stay out, there was no reason for Li Yu to be overly cautious in his own home. After walking a few steps into the study, he heard Ye Qinghuan's voice.

"Tianchi, answer me," he was saying seriously. "Is he a human or a yao?"

Li Yu really wasn't a yao, but he was very sensitive to people calling him that. It was his own fault for pretending to be a carp spirit. As soon as Ye Qinghuan mentioned yao, Li Yu automatically assumed it was about him. Was his cover that easily blown? First Chu Yanyu and now Ye Qinghuan…

Chu Yanyu had suspected him because a servant had spotted him transforming. What had tipped Ye Qinghuan off? Li Yu was completely

certain he'd never transformed in front of him before. He held his breath and continued listening.

Mu Tianchi trusted Ye Qinghuan. He didn't answer him at once. After a brief moment of thought, he said, "Why do you ask?"

"That day, when he suddenly appeared in the lotus pond and handed the tiger talisman to me, he wouldn't leave the water no matter what and wouldn't let anyone else near him," Ye Qinghuan replied. "It was…very strange. Later, when I asked the guards, not a single person had seen him enter the manor."

Mu Tianchi listened without moving a single muscle in his face. The tiger talisman was top secret, and there were only a few people who knew about it. But everyone knew the crown prince consort had run out of the palace for help.

The emperor had seen the fish take away the tiger talisman with his own eyes. The crown prince had led the emperor to believe that the fish had handed the talisman over to his consort, and his consort had figured out a way to bring the troops to save them. This way, the story matched up with the rumors circulating outside. The emperor never suspected a thing. In reality, only the crown prince and Li Yu knew that there had never been any relay in the middle. It was fish!Li Yu who had delivered the talisman.

Because the whole Princess Langya incident had been dealt with so smoothly, the crown prince had never given it too much thought. But now that Ye Qinghuan was bringing up suspicions, it was clear he had been negligent.

Just a handful of questions wasn't close to enough to make him admit to anything, though. He raised an eyebrow. "And what does that prove?"

“Nothing,” said Ye Qinghuan. “It’s possible saozi could’ve snuck in while the guards weren’t paying attention. However, a civilian did request an audience with the House of Cheng’en, though, and told us that they ran into a monster that was fish on top and human on the bottom which escaped into the river outside of the manor. I didn’t believe it at first, of course. I told them not to speak nonsense. But later I found out that that river is connected to the lotus pond…”

Holy shit! thought Li Yu. *He even connected those dots?!*

When he was delivering the talisman, the complicated route he took had forced him to transform several times. When he arrived at the House of Cheng’en, he had been in merman form. He kept his tail hidden in the water and told Ye Qinghuan not to approach him. Ye Qinghuan had never said anything after the fact, so Li Yu had thought it was fine. He didn’t expect Ye-shizi to start suspecting him.

And the person who saw him as a manmer… Sob, he’d been short on time and he’d had no choice. It was lucky that man ended up going to Ye Qinghuan… Li Yu had been in a rush to save his husband, he completely forgot he’d been seen!

The crown prince was deep in thought, his brow furrowed. He didn’t say anything else.

“To be honest, none of this proves anything,” Ye Qinghuan said hesitantly. “It’s just…I heard about Noble Lady Chu slandering the crown prince consort, saying he was your pet fish. Th-that’s when I remembered… that day when he was hiding in the water, there was something silvery at the bottom of the pond. I didn’t think much of it, but after hearing Noble Lady

Chu’s absurd claims, I thought it must have been a fish tail… But Tianchi, no matter what, I wanted to come ask you first.”

Ye Qinghuan had thought it over for some time, trying to find any flaws in his logic. But really, he’d already reached a conclusion. He’d waited until now because he’d finally made up his mind to ask the crown prince for the truth.

Whether it was Noble Lady Chu or Noble Lady Wang, all that mattered was that Ye Qinghuan was firmly loyal to the crown prince, so who cared about whatever his name was—Noble Lady Chu? Noble Lady Wang? All that mattered was the prince’s safety.

No matter if Li Yu was human or something else, he was certain that Li Yu had no ill intentions toward the crown prince or his family. While he’d mulled over these recent events, that truth had felt absolutely clear to him.

Li Yu, meanwhile, felt so awkward he could’ve carved a fish tank into the ground to jump into, but he was afraid to come face-to-face with Ye Qinghuan. He’d really managed to work it out…

What if Ye-shizi wanted him to answer? What would he say?

It was easy to simply refuse to admit to it, but Ye Qinghuan had already seen his tail… If he lied, would that clear Ye Qinghuan’s suspicions? That wasn’t solving the problem, that was just hiding his head in the sand!

Li Yu didn’t want to harm his friends…and he didn’t want the crown prince to harm his friends for his sake.

The crown prince wasn’t sure what to do. “If you knew the truth, what would you do?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Ye Qinghuan said. “He saved the emperor, he saved you, and he saved me too. He even cured your muteness and birthed your children. I wouldn’t tell anyone, not even the princess. I just want to know the truth. I don’t want to do anything to him.” If he really had wanted to do something, he wouldn’t have waited this long to see the crown prince in private.

Li Yu couldn’t have been more moved. Nice one, Ye Qinghuan! As expected of his cousin-in-law! Thinking back to the day he delivered the tiger talisman, when Prince Li didn’t believe him, it had been Ye Qinghuan who helped him. Even if he’d suspected something, Ye Qinghuan had always been taking care of him.

Mu Tianchi observed Ye Qinghuan. He knew Ye Qinghuan very well, and he could tell he was serious and definitely not lying. There was no need to deceive him any further, so the crown prince nodded. “Yes,” he said. “It’s as you suspect.”

“…So, he really is?”

“…Yes.”

Even though he’d thought he was prepared, Ye Qinghuan’s jaw still dropped.

No wonder Li Yu could give birth and was able to help the crown prince with so much! He was a yao!

There really were yao in this world!

“Wh-why is he here with you?” he stuttered. Ye-shizi feared ghosts and gods alike, as well as yao. He couldn’t figure out why a great yao would want to marry a plain old human.

“Because he and I are fated,” the crown prince said calmly. “We’ll be married for a hundred lives; this is just the first.”

Li Yu had assumed the crown prince would mention his tribulation, but he didn’t. The crown prince thought that was Xiaoyu’s secret, and he refused to reveal it no matter what. He’d rather make up a story instead.

Li Yu felt like he’d discovered something. The crown prince wasn’t just bullshitting, this was another form of PDA!

Ye-shizi, having suffered another bout of PDA, slapped his thigh in realization. “That’s why you have a thing for fish, right? I-I understand.”

Wait, what? What do you understand? Li Yu was shocked. *My husband doesn’t have any special interests like that!*

Chapter 149:
Fishy Survey

WITH THE LOOK Ye Qinghuan had on his face, who could say what he was imagining.

“But since he’s…that, why doesn’t he just use his powers to do things?” There were some things Ye Qinghuan hadn’t worked out yet.

“Xiaoyu has his own principles,” said the crown prince sternly. “You can’t force him to do anything.”

Ye Qinghuan nodded. As long as Li Yu was on the crown prince’s side and wouldn’t harm him. But he had one more very important question. “Then Dabao and the others, and Xuebao, are they all…”

“No,” responded the crown prince.

Xuebao was born as a human. The crown prince had stayed by Li Yu in the delivery room partially because he was afraid of potential accidents. He had decided long ago that he would protect Xiaoyu at any cost. If anything happened, there were a lot of people who would have to be dealt with immediately.

His daughter definitely wasn’t a yao. As for his sons, though they were born as fish, they were all human now, and they couldn’t transform. The crown prince didn’t want to complicate matters, so he just said they weren’t.

Xiaoyu had once told him that their four sons would have to wait until they were seven to turn into fish again. That was still a long way off. If it came to it, they could even explain it to their Ye-shushu themselves.

Ye Qinghuan sighed in relief, having apparently accepted this answer. “Then how should I interact with him? Is there anything I shouldn’t do?”

Li Yu was a fish yao; that was an exhilarating thought on its own. He hadn’t known before—he’d just thought that Li Yu had a good personality. Now that he knew, he thought yao with such personalities must be hard to come by.

“…No!” *Even if there was, I wouldn’t tell you.*

“Then, would he fear Xiongfeng?” Ye Qinghuan figured if Li Yu was afraid of him, he’d have to keep his beloved canine on a leash from now on.

The crown prince looked at him with an expression that said “Are you stupid?” Ye Qinghuan smacked his own forehead. “Right, how could I forget he used to play with Xiongfeng? He’s probably fine.”

Obviously. Li Yu smiled. Xiongfeng had long since stopped treating him as a stranger. He’d probably caught on way before his master had.

Ye Qinghuan wasn’t very knowledgeable and had a lot of questions. Once he started, he didn’t stop. The crown prince was getting tired. He was ready to throw him out of the manor.

“Okay, okay, I’ll leave, don’t throw me out.” Ye Qinghuan smiled as he asked for mercy. “Now that I know everything, I promise you I won’t tell anyone else.”

But the crown prince obviously already knew Ye-shizi was reliable, otherwise he wouldn’t have revealed any of this to him.

Ye Qinghuan bade his goodbyes and was just about to leave when the crown prince called out to him, “Wait!”

Ye Qinghuan looked back. “Remember,” the crown prince said in a serious tone that Ye Qinghuan had never heard before, “he and I are one. Protecting him is the same as protecting me.”

“…Yes, Your Highness.” Ye Qinghuan suddenly understood the crown prince’s intentions, so he also became more serious than he’d ever been. He stopped smiling and clasped his hands together in a solemn bow.

Now that he knew the truth, he no longer felt so conflicted. Recently, he’d been trying to suppress what he was feeling, and he couldn’t let his wife or parents find out what was weighing on him, so this was quite a relief.

Ye Qinghuan walked out humming a little tune. When he looked up, he spotted Li Yu, who was standing outside. He couldn’t help the shiver that ran up his spine.

Things were different now. Now, he knew Li Yu was a yao. If he was expected to treat him exactly the same as before, that still felt a bit too hard!

“Ye Qinghuan!” Li Yu knew he was struggling and deliberately waved to him. Ye Qinghuan’s hands never even shook when he was killing the traitorous Loulan soldiers, but right now his face was bright red, and he greeted Li Yu weakly before running off, sticking close to the wall.

Of course Ye-shizi definitely wasn’t afraid! He just had some important business to go handle, such as figuring out a new place for that civilian who had seen a manmer…

Li Yu was just teasing Ye-shizi; he didn’t have any ulterior motives. As soon as Ye Qinghuan left, he walked into the study.

“Tianchi, I’m here!” Li Yu said, smiling.

When he saw him, the seriousness on the crown prince's face melted away, leaving behind only gentle love. He didn't seem surprised that this fish would come to the study.

"Tianchi, I heard the conversation between you and Ye Qinghuan just now," said Li Yu.

The prince held his hand. "I'm sorry, Ye Qinghuan had already noticed. I couldn't hide it anymore."

Li Yu shook his head. "That's nothing! Ye-shizi is family. But what was that you told him about some kind of fate of a hundred lifetimes…"

Li Yu wanted to ask what the crown prince had been thinking, but the prince glanced at him shyly. "Was that not okay?"

The desolation in his eyes struck Li Yu right in the heart. "It's okay!" he said loudly, hurrying to reassure him.

The crown prince smiled. "Then that's that."

Telling Ye Qinghuan a small white lie was nothing. Although they already had four sons and a daughter, the crown prince still had a lingering fear that the carp spirit would abandon him. If they really had an agreement of a hundred lifetimes, he wouldn't have to worry about this fish leaving.

Li Yu, completely besotted with his husband, didn't notice that he'd been tricked.

Alone together, as usual, there was no separating the two of them.

As he sat on his husband's lap in a thoroughly improper fashion, Li Yu remembered the important matters. "Tianchi, can I help women who have been widowed? If they want a new life, can I…support them?"

He only had a vague plan. Since he didn't know what these women wanted, he didn't know how exactly to set things up, but he hoped he could provide them somewhere to go to ask for help. He wanted to show everyone his stance on the situation, that there was someone in this world who supported widows making a new start.

The crown prince immediately knew who he was thinking about. "You want to help Lady Liang," he said, after a moment's pondering. "But her marriage was ordered by the emperor. It won't be easy."

"I know. She doesn't seem to want my help either. I want to help other women who are in her situation."

Li Yu actually wanted to start an organization similar to a women's federation. If he could provide help to women like that, he would maintain it for as long as they wanted it. Of course, that included Lady Liang too.

Originally, he'd been planning to use both emotion and logic to convince the crown prince so he could accept his worldview, but as the words arrived in his mouth, he changed his mind.

The crown prince had told Ye Qinghuan "he is me." That was how important he was to the prince. The thought distracted Li Yu for a while. He was curious how far the crown prince was willing to go for him… Everyone said playing cute and whining was the best way to test how caring your husband was. He'd just whine a little bit to see!

He grasped the crown prince's arm, shaking it tentatively. "Tianchi, I just want to help them, is that all right?"

Mu Tianchi paused. "Yes," he chuckled.

That's it?

"Then can I tell you why I want to help them?" Li Yu tried.

“Yes.”

Li Yu was delighted. He immediately listed out everything that was unfair about the treatment of women in ancient times. If he wanted to change this era, it would be best if he could get the people to sympathize with women. It might be very difficult. After all, many people would not be able to relate to their experiences. But lots of people had a sister or a daughter, just as Xuebao was his and the crown prince’s daughter. If they were willing to help these women, perhaps one day, it would help a woman in their lives?

“It makes sense,” said the crown prince. “What do you want to do?”

The crown prince had a feeling this wasn’t going to be easy. If he just wanted to hand out money or food, after all, there would have been no need to discuss it with him beforehand; the crown prince consort could just do that on his own.

Li Yu fluttered his lashes and didn’t answer. “Your Highness, let’s do a public opinion survey!”

“What’s that?” The crown prince had never heard of such a thing.

“It’s—just watch!”

Li Yu thought up a few questions, turned them into paper forms, and ordered the servants to copy them. These were “surveys,” he said. He got ready to hand them out.

Before he left, he laid down some rules: anyone who filled out the survey seriously could get one copper coin as reward, but each person was limited to one survey. This was basically the same as handing out free money. Li Yu asked Wang Xi to spread the news ahead of time. A line immediately formed outside.

There were plenty of people who lamented that they were missing out because they couldn't write. Li Yu asked Wang Xi to pass along the word that it didn't matter if they couldn't write. The servants of the crown prince manor would be available to read the questions out loud, and they could answer them verbally. Their responses would be recorded, and they could still receive the money.

With that, the line grew longer and longer. Wang Xi soon ran out of surveys and had to add several dozen more copies to make sure everyone received one.

There were plenty of scholars among the respondents. When they read the survey, they all shook their heads. What kind of nonsense was this?

For example: "What is your opinion on a widowed woman remarrying?" Did that even need to be answered? After they'd studied for all these years, how could they not understand the concept of shame?

Many people didn't even hesitate before answering the first question. The next question, however…

"Imagine if your relative unfortunately lost her husband. Please re-answer the first question."

If everyone was able to easily answer the first question, the second question felt a lot more difficult.

One could only receive money if they answered the survey seriously. Plenty of people thought it over carefully. What if it was a woman from their own family?

Like that, Li Yu received the people's thoughts and opinions in exchange for a little money.

Li Yu went through the surveys. Out of the two hundred or so people who participated, less than 10 percent were firmly opposed for both questions. The number of people who answered positively to both questions was also less than 10 percent. When it came to their own relatives, the rest of the people's attitudes changed from "strongly opposed" to "acceptable" between the first and second questions.

As he expected, it was easy to stand on a moral high ground when the situation didn't involve you. The respondents clearly all knew that a widow's life wasn't easy. If it was a woman close to them, they wouldn't judge her so harshly.

Once he'd organized the results, Li Yu handed them to the crown prince. The crown prince skimmed through it. "Xiaoyu wanted to plead for the people," he said approvingly.

"That's right," Li Yu answered.

He could only help a few people by himself. But if he could speak to the emperor and enact change from the top down, it would help more than just a few people.

"Tianchi, will you help me?" Li Yu asked.

The crown prince's response was firm. "Yes."

"Because 'I am you'?" Li Yu asked, half jokingly, half emotional.

So, the fish had heard… The crown prince smiled. "Because I will give you everything you ask for."

"Tianchi—" He suddenly remembered the main quest that had gone quiet after Princess Langya's revolt.

What did it mean to “share the country”? The crown prince said he would give him everything he wanted. Did that mean he should push forward bravely?

“Apart from helping these women, there’s something else I want…”

The crown prince had given him too much love. Li Yu pressed on bravely. “Tianchi, this is my…last tribulation. If one day you ascend to that spot, and I wanted your country, what would you do?”

Chapter 150:
Helping People Fishy Style

MU TIANCHI WAS SHOCKED for a moment, not because Li Yu had the audacity to ask for the country, but because of what he said about his “last tribulation.”

What did he mean by “last”?

Although Xiaoyu hadn’t said why he was by his side, Liao Kong had mentioned that Xiaoyu needed to overcome tribulations. He himself could feel this was true. Last time, because of the bandits, Xiaoyu had said he hadn’t completely overcome the tribulation.

Naturally, Mu Tianchi wondered: If this was the last tribulation, did that mean Xiaoyu would leave him afterward?

He was now the crown prince and had both sons and a daughter. From the outside, his life looked perfect. But he was afraid that this perfect life would make the carp spirit think he’d spent enough time by his side and that it was time to leave. He cared for Xiaoyu more and more each day. He couldn’t accept Xiaoyu leaving him, unless he died.

Every time he brought it up, Xiaoyu would stumble over his words, never giving him a straight answer, so by now he would do anything to keep Xiaoyu at his side.

He knew Xiaoyu was a kind man who wanted to take care of even Piaoxue and Lady Liang. There was no way Mu Tianchi would believe Xiaoyu had stayed by his side for this long just because he wanted to rule the country.

Xiaoyu was different from everyone else.

If he really wanted something, why hadn’t he asked when he was at his lowest? That way, no matter what reason he was given, the crown prince would say yes. But Xiaoyu had chosen to mention it when there was nothing standing in his way. If he were sly and talked his way out of it, or straight up rejected him, what could Xiaoyu do?

Xiaoyu was so smart. How could he not know?

Xiaoyu truly didn’t need to even ask. After he ascended the throne, he planned to give Xiaoyu the same amount of power as a prince regent. He knew Xiaoyu had things he wanted to do and the ability to do them, but he was restricted by the title of crown prince consort and afraid that it would weaken their relationship besides.

But how could that ever happen? While the imperial physicians were curing his poison, he had been unconscious for a long time and had spent a lot of that time dreaming of the past.

The cure for his muteness, his crown prince position, even his life, were all thanks to Xiaoyu’s help. If prince regent wasn’t enough and Xiaoyu wanted more, then if he were able, he wouldn’t shy away from giving it to him.

From Xiaoyu’s tone of voice, though, it didn’t actually sound like he genuinely wanted the country. It seemed more like he was testing him.

Mu Tianchi saw right through him. This test might have something to do with the last tribulation, he thought. If he answered to Xiaoyu’s satisfaction, would Xiaoyu just leave?

It wasn’t impossible!

Since Xuebao's birth, the insecurities within Mu Tianchi's heart had started to grow. He couldn't make a single mistake. He'd rather not answer at all than risk answering incorrectly!

He clenched his jaw. "I'll think about it and get back to you."

Li Yu, who had been waiting for the standard answer, was taken aback. *Huh? Didn't the crown prince just say he would give me anything I wanted?*

Li Yu couldn't help but puff out his cheeks indignantly. If men were reliable, pigs could fly!

On one hand, he couldn't believe the crown prince was just saying empty things to make him happy. On the other hand, he knew his request had been a little ridiculous.

A country was hardly a trivial matter. Some people could give up their parents and children to rule a country. Some might even throw away their own life. A country was important, and it was the crown prince's family legacy. Who was he to demand the crown prince share his family legacy with him?

Li Yu scolded himself for his stupidity. Prince Jing's love had made him lose brain cells! He'd gotten carried away, forgetting everyone had their own limits. It was an extremely stupid question; he'd put both himself and the crown prince in an awkward position.

"Sorry, I…shouldn't have asked that," he said. "Just pretend I never brought it up."

He couldn't resent the crown prince for this—he was the one who had gone too far, after all. There was no way the final quest would be so easy. This was just a small stumble; he'd forget about it.

Besides, the crown prince hadn’t even rejected him outright. He’d said he would think about it. If it were anyone else, the prince definitely would’ve gotten mad.

They had only been together about two years. Perhaps in another two years, or perhaps when they were old, the crown prince would have “thought about it” enough to give him the answer?

Either way, the boss had been defeated, and now that he was the crown prince consort there was no one who could bully him. Even if an outstanding carp spirit like him still had to transform once a day, it wasn’t that big a problem, right?

Li Yu comforted himself with logic and reason. He refused to let this setback get to him. He didn’t get the answer he wanted, but his relationship with the crown prince was still the same.

As a result, Mu Tianchi was even more convinced that delaying and not saying exactly what he was feeling had been the right decision.

Otherwise, this fish might just get up and leave him and his children behind.

He could tell his deflection had made Xiaoyu a little dejected. But that was okay; he’d make it up to him in other ways.

With the last quest still out of reach, Li Yu threw himself into the women’s federation. Of course, this was ancient China, so no one would understand what a women’s federation was yet. Li Yu made a few adjustments and named it the Ladies’ Assistance Society. The first step was to get the emperor’s support, and then they could create an office somewhere in the capital. If things went well, they could expand to other areas.

After conducting the survey, Li Yu believed in his cause even more. The crown prince thought up an idea for him. Women remaining widows was a deep-rooted principle. If he wanted to change it, it wasn't enough to just have the people on his side. He needed the court officials on his side too. That way, he would be more persuasive.

Li Yu thought that made sense. But how would he get the officials to fill out his survey?

The crown prince seemed to smile at his consort, then glanced at his own lap. Li Yu's face immediately went red. *You have both sons and a daughter now! Still?!*

The crown prince consort complained, but he still sat down.

The crown prince held his consort, satisfied. Xuebao's one month celebration banquet had just passed, so they couldn't hold another one so soon. That was what Li Yu was struggling with too—it wasn't easy to find an excuse. Li Yu was just wondering what the crown prince was going to say when the crown prince casually summoned all the officials from the Six Ministries to the manor.

Okay, fine, his husband had special rights…

With the crown prince there to watch over everything, the officials put in a lot of effort on the survey. Li Yu was able to finish his task without much effort.

At first, he thought most of these officials wouldn't approve of widows remarrying, but in fact the opposite turned out to be true. Li Yu thought about it carefully. Perhaps it was because officials had seen and experienced more, so they knew almost nothing good came to a widowed woman. It was just that the court promoted it.

Li Yu sorted all the survey results and put together a statement. He'd hoped the crown prince could talk to the emperor about it, but the prince said he should do it, since it was his idea. Li Yu started to panic. Didn't the crown prince say he would help him? Was he helping him jump into a fire?!

Besides, he was the crown prince consort. If he went to court, wouldn't he get cursed at?

But Li Yu really did want to start this women's federation. He wasn't just talking about it for fun.

The crown prince went to court, and Li Yu followed closely behind.

Sob sob, he felt like the imperial censors and a few of the older officials might bore holes in him with the force of their stares.

When the emperor saw Li Yu, confusion was written all over his face. He turned to Prince Jing.

Mu Tianchi smiled. "Royal Father, the crown prince consort has a report for you to see. As a member of the royal family, I believe he has the right to bring matters to your attention."

Whose daughter-in-law randomly brought in reports?

The emperor was still a little confused, but he valued competence. Thinking of Li Yu's ideas on dealing with locusts on the western border, the emperor decided to allow the report. Li Yu handed it over to the emperor himself.

When he finished reading, the emperor chuckled. "This is a custom left over from the past—I didn't realize we'd been keeping it up until now. Thank you for collecting all this information. I will consider it. There are merits to the idea of a ladies' aid society, so I will leave that to you. Formulate a specific plan and hand it in to me…"

That was it?

Li Yu was internally delighted. He was too lucky! He thought he'd have to write a beautiful essay to convince the emperor, but he agreed just like that!

He hurried to thank the emperor. The officials around him all chorused, "Long live the emperor," which meant they agreed with the decision. A thought occurred to Li Yu, and he suddenly understood. Why didn't the officials oppose him? Because women having to remain a widow wasn't a rule the emperor had come up with. If he had a chance to abolish an old custom and improve his reputation, there was no reason for the emperor not to take it.

Besides, even if he didn't want to at first, once he saw the stance of all these officials, the emperor had to consider it carefully anyway…

Was that why the crown prince wanted him to collect the opinions of the officials?! Li Yu turned around suddenly to look at the crown prince. Was the crown prince teaching him?

The prince smiled back at him gently.

Li Yu felt like there was something squeezing at his heart. He could tell the crown prince didn't try to put any boundaries up between them at all —he was even guiding him. He still loved him, so why did he have to, cough cough…"think" about sharing the country?

Li Yu wasn't sure.

Later, the emperor declared that after one half of a couple had passed away, the other party was free to do as they pleased. Remaining a widow was a virtuous choice, but there was nothing wrong with doing the opposite.

Since the emperor had made his stance clear, Li Yu could continue with his plans.

Because there were so many things to take care of, setting up the Ladies' Assistance Society was all Li Yu had time for. He had to find a location and people. Then, once it was up and running, he'd have to worry about people coming to start trouble.

Finally, the society welcomed its first woman in need. After her husband passed away, she'd suffered torment at the hands of her husband's family. She couldn't take it anymore and wanted to leave, but the elders of her husband's family wouldn't let her go. Despairing, the woman had tried to take her own life many times, but each time, she was saved. She had heard about this society, and it was her last hope.

Li Yu hurriedly gathered Madam Qin, Xiaoluo, and a few others to talk to this woman. As the crown prince consort and with the emperor's guidance, using all the methods available to him, he was finally able to convince the woman's in-laws to let her go peacefully.

Li Yu had already mentally prepared himself, but he was increasingly starting to realize the importance of patience and attention to detail.

Before long, the society's work was starting to gain momentum, and there were more and more requests for help. The emperor ordered trained female officials to take over, and Li Yu took a step back, only occasionally offering ideas.

The Ladies' Assistance Society was gaining a reputation. After a while, even Lady Liang gathered the courage to come with a servant…

If there was a new path to walk, why stay in the mud?

The crown prince said Lady Liang's situation was more complicated than an ordinary woman's. Li Yu was afraid he wouldn't be able to convince the emperor, so he conscripted the crown prince to help.

Fortunately, the emperor had written the announcement himself, saying one could not purposefully make things difficult for a widow, so he could hardly do so himself. Although Lady Liang was in danger of defying the emperor's orders, because he was the one who'd decided on this marriage, the emperor's decision had been what brought Lady Liang all this pain.

The emperor hated Mu Tianxiao so much that he hadn't spared a single thought for Lady Liang. Since Lady Liang and Mu Tianxiao had no connection anymore, the crown prince suggested the emperor should allow Lady Liang to divorce the late Mu Tianxiao. Li Yu was speechless. The crown prince really would stop at nothing when it came to the sixth prince.

But wasn't that the most effective method?!

The crown prince's suggestion was exactly what the emperor wanted too, so he allowed it.

Lady Liang regained her freedom. She kept bowing to the emperor, the crown prince, and Li Yu.

"There's no need to thank me," said the crown prince. "If it weren't for Xiaoyu, we might not have been able to get here."

Lady Liang understood. She kowtowed a few extra times at Li Yu.

Li Yu glanced at the prince, and the prince looked back at him. The crown prince really didn't have any reservations when it came to him, he thought—he would even give all the credit to him.

“Tianchi, can we discuss that thing we talked about last time?” Li Yu asked.

Mu Tianchi could already guess what he was about to say, and his expression changed immediately. “Goodbye!”

Chapter 151:
Fishy Tribulation

WAS THE CROWN PRINCE hiding something from him?

Li Yu's intuition told him yes. He didn't know what to do. They already had five children together. If the crown prince trusted him, why couldn't he tell him the truth?

But thinking about how his own lies had spread like weeds at the beginning of their relationship, Li Yu couldn't muster the courage to ask.

In this day and age, were husbands not allowed to have little secrets to themselves?

…*Got it!* A light bulb appeared above Li Yu's head. How could he have forgotten? He still had an opportunity to watch a secret in the system!

It had been some time, but Li Yu immediately entered the system. He'd collected a bunch of secrets that he hadn't viewed yet as rewards for completing quests in the past. He had to get around to them sooner or later.

‹The secrets from before, I want to watch them…› said Li Yu.

The system responded immediately, listing out all of the crown prince's secrets. There still weren't any explanations, just sequences of changing scenery.

Li Yu was stumped. He just had to guess?! Besides, he himself couldn't explain what kind of secret the crown prince had been hiding recently.

Li Yu tried asking, *‹Are any of the secrets more recent?›*

‹The secrets are random and cannot be specified,› the system replied.

‹…Fine, I always knew you were a fish-scamming system.›

Li Yu had no choice but to watch all of them.

Most of the secrets were about the secret ways the crown prince dealt with people. Usually, Li Yu could figure it out depending on who appeared in the scene. Very quickly, Li Yu learned a lot of things he didn't know before.

Like Mu Tianxiao being reported by the Secretary of the Ministry of Works, Zheng Jing, thus losing the emperor's trust. It had been the crown prince who'd sent word to Zheng Jing.

Like all of the crown prince's letters to the emperor, luring the emperor step by step into accepting Li Yu as his consort.

Like how, before they left for the western border, the crown prince had specifically gone to Ye Qian to ask him for the green plum wine he'd made for them.

Li Yu was getting dizzy from all that he saw, but this was the true crown prince…

Whenever he finished watching one secret, a new one would pop up.

Li Yu suddenly saw a fish swim by in one of the scenes. Was this it here? He immediately opened up that secret.

This secret took place in the water. There was a black fish with gold specks, doing its best to bite onto a piece of a child's clothing, fighting against the water to swim up.

This…wasn't this him before he turned into a koi? At the time, he was still mostly black, and he hadn't completed the tasks to change yet.

Li Yu wouldn’t be wrong about himself. But he’d never grabbed onto a child in the water. This child looked even bigger than Dabao.

When the child turned his red cheeks toward him and saw that a fish was saving him, his eyes filled with surprise.

Li Yu was even more surprised than the child was.

This child—though it wasn’t Dabao, had a face that was very similar. Li Yu finally recognized him! This was Little Chubs! Dabao’s dad when he was younger!

Li Yu choked. He’d almost forgotten this was one of the crown prince’s secrets. That meant the child in the secret must be the crown prince.

But…this didn’t make sense.

When he’d met Little Chubs as a fish before, it had been an illusion. How had he shown up in the prince’s secret?

Illusions were fake and didn’t exist, but the secrets were real.

Why had they gotten mixed up?

Li Yu didn’t understand, so he continued watching. This should be Little Chubs’s point of view. Li Yu saw the black fish curl up so Little Chubs could pet it.

…At first, he’d suspected that this black and gold fish might not even be him, but it was so enthusiastic—who else could it be?

The black fish dragged the boy to shore, and the boy grabbed onto the fish excitedly. Under the fish’s guidance, he started rubbing the fish’s head clumsily…

Little Chubs and the fish played for a while. When he heard other people approaching, the fish dove into the water. Li Yu saw the pond sparkle with a golden light. Clearly, that was where the fish was hiding.

Little Chubs wanted to search for the fish, but that was when the emperor and a group of imperial physicians all rushed over, asking the small boy how he was feeling. Little Chubs passed out, and the physicians realized he was suffering from a fever. The emperor demanded the physicians cure Little Chubs no matter what.

In the end, a monk showed up… Li Yu recognized him: it was a young Liao Kong.

Liao Kong helped the imperial physicians cure Little Chubs's fever, and after listening to Liao Kong's suggestion, the emperor changed the child's name.

The emperor chuckled. "I saw the pond glistening full of golden light, so let's call you Tianchi."

Since Li Yu was a fish, when he'd hidden himself, he hadn't realized the lighting in the pond had changed. Now that he'd seen it from someone else's point of view, he knew that the golden light the emperor had seen was from the golden scales on his stomach.

Had the crown prince been named Tianchi because of him?

Little Chubs—Mu Tianchi—returned to the pond after he recovered, gazing at the water. He had already forgotten what had happened after he fell into the pond. He couldn't recall anything.

After this secret ended, it was a while before Li Yu could calm down.

What did this mean? Why had the illusion turned into reality? Did… he really exist in the crown prince's youth?

The system didn’t answer. The memories continued to switch scenes, flashing constantly.

Li Yu continued on to the next secret. He noticed that in one of the secrets, Mu Tianchi was already dressed like he was now—as the crown prince—so he chose that one.

In the secret, Mu Tianchi was sitting at his desk, concentrating on something he was writing.

Li Yu waited for a long time, but he didn’t see anyone else around. The crown prince continued to write.

Li Yu thought about going to read what the prince was writing. Usually, when the crown prince was taking care of private matters, he would leave him alone. But thinking about the way the crown prince trusted him, and all the ways he helped him, Li Yu gathered the courage to take a look. He thought the secret must be whatever the prince was writing.

Perhaps it was a political matter, maybe even top secret…

The secrets all contained events that had already happened; they were memories. The crown prince inside this memory shouldn’t be able to see him.

Just one look.

Li Yu took a quick glance down…and saw his own name.

He paused, then looked down again, reading the line, “…have Li Yu as my empress, with the same authority as a prince regent.”

He realized at once that this was the crown prince making preparations for his ascent to the throne!

If the crown prince became emperor, then Li Yu would naturally become the fish empress. He had thought about this countless times and had come to accept it. There was nothing particularly special about choosing him to be the empress, but the second half was the important part: “with the same authority as a prince regent”!

The empress’s job was to maintain order in the emperor’s harem, and at most to admonish the emperor slightly if he ever did anything too crazy. But a prince regent was different. A prince regent held real authority and could participate in politics!

Li Yu’s teeth started to ache. What was his husband planning so sneakily?!

An empress who held the same authority as a prince regent. What was that, the empress regent?

—Wait, wasn’t this “sharing the country”?

Li Yu’s brain spun. *‹System, can I complete the main quest now?›*

‹Sorry, user, the tyrant has not stated this outright, so it doesn’t count.›

He’d already written it down, so how did it not count?

Li Yu was about to argue when he saw the crown prince put down his brush and carefully read over what he’d just written with a smile. Then he sighed, brought the paper to a candle, and lit it, watching as the flame swallowed up all the words.

…The crown prince had burned the paper. No wonder it didn’t count.

But he didn’t blame the crown prince. He was only one step away from becoming the emperor. Writing something like this was a sign of great

disrespect, so of course he had to get rid of it.

So why had he written it in the first place?

And if the crown prince wanted him to participate in running the country, why wouldn't he let him know?

Why did he do his best to avoid the subject whenever the country was brought up…?

Now that he'd discovered the crown prince's intentions, Li Yu had a lot of new questions. After he exited the system, Li Yu went to look for the crown prince to get answers.

But the crown prince wasn't home—he had gone to the Ministry of Revenue. It occurred to Li Yu that he'd been neglecting Princess Xuebao recently while he'd been busy with the Ladies' Assistance Society, so he decided to go check on the kids.

When Li Yu entered Xuebao's room, he saw that Xiaoluo had fallen asleep in front of the cradle.

Xiaoluo was still young. Apart from taking care of Xuebao, she would sometimes be called on by Li Yu to help at the Ladies' Assistance Society, so she was very busy every day.

Li Yu was an understanding master; he let Xiaoluo sleep. From this side of the cradle, he could see Xuebao's head was turned and facing the other side. When Li Yu walked over, he found Dabao and the others there as well.

The four babies were laying in a heap on the ground. They were asleep too; Erbao's fingers still on his chubby little face, maintaining the funny face he was making to entertain his sister. Dabao and Sanbao were pinching Erbao's face while Sibao slept a little further away, curled up into

a ball. It was unclear if he'd rolled over and then fallen asleep, or if he'd rolled over there while he was asleep already.

Smiling, Li Yu tucked the blanket tighter around his daughter. Xuebao's little cheeks were flushed pink. Her eyes moved beneath their lids, and Li Yu hurried to pat her gently on the back. Before Xuebao could wake up, she had fallen back into dreamland.

Li Yu turned and took two blankets from the bed. He draped one over Xiaoluo's shoulders and put one over the four babies. When he laid the blanket down, he thought he was being very gentle. But it still woke Dabao. He got up, rubbing his eyes sleepily, and called out, "Dad?"

Li Yu hurried to shush him, thinking he could get Dabao to fall back to sleep just like Xuebao. However, Dabao only became more awake.

The responsible fish gege worked with his fish dad to cover the other babies in blankets. He even followed Li Yu's example, tucking the blanket around his sister and patting her to take care of her.

Dabao really was a responsible older brother. Li Yu couldn't help but smile.

Soon, Xiaoluo woke up. When she realized that she'd fallen asleep and the consort was taking care of the babies for her, she became very apologetic. Li Yu didn't blame her, though. He flapped his hands at her casually and told her to go rest.

Incredibly grateful, Xiaoluo bowed to Li Yu before leaving. Thinking that the young masters might be hungry after they woke up, she went to prepare something for them to eat.

It was a nice day out today, and very warm. The curtains had been left open a crack, so that the room didn't grow too stuffy, but Li Yu decided

to open the window to let in some air.

The sky was very blue. Li Yu glanced at it casually and saw a few dark clouds floating over from the distance.

Mu Tianchi now worked in the Ministry of Revenue as well. Eager to prove himself, the minister was in the middle of reporting the major tasks of the Ministry of Revenue to the crown prince when a cold breeze blew through the room.

The crown prince glanced out the window. It had been bright and sunny a moment ago, but now, the sky was covered in dark clouds, a full thunderstorm.

“Your Highness, please be careful,” said the Minister of Revenue, concerned.

Mu Tianchi didn’t hear him. He paused, one hand holding a report, and kept staring out the window. In the blink of an eye, a flash of lightning lit up the sky, immediately followed by thunder.

That thunder was much louder than normal.

When he looked in the direction the lightning had struck, it seemed to be the crown prince’s manor!

Xiaoyu was there. Mu Tianchi suddenly turned white. He thought back to all the ancient books he’d pored through before. Lightning of that immense size accompanied by wind and rain…this was the sign of a tribulation!

The crown prince immediately threw down his brush and rushed to the door.

The Minister of Revenue and a few other officials were all shocked and rushed forward to stop him, but he ignored them all. The minister couldn’t stop the crown prince, so he ordered someone to retrieve a raincoat and bamboo hat. But by the time the items were fetched, the crown prince had already disappeared.

Mu Tianchi raced through the heavy rain on horseback, returning to the manor at breakneck speed. He didn’t even take the time to dismount, rushing into the manor still on horseback.

Wang-gonggong was startled by his sudden appearance. When he nervously asked him what was going on, the crown prince didn’t respond.

He ran to the bedroom. He could hear the cries of children from outside. With his heart pounding even faster, he rushed into the room…

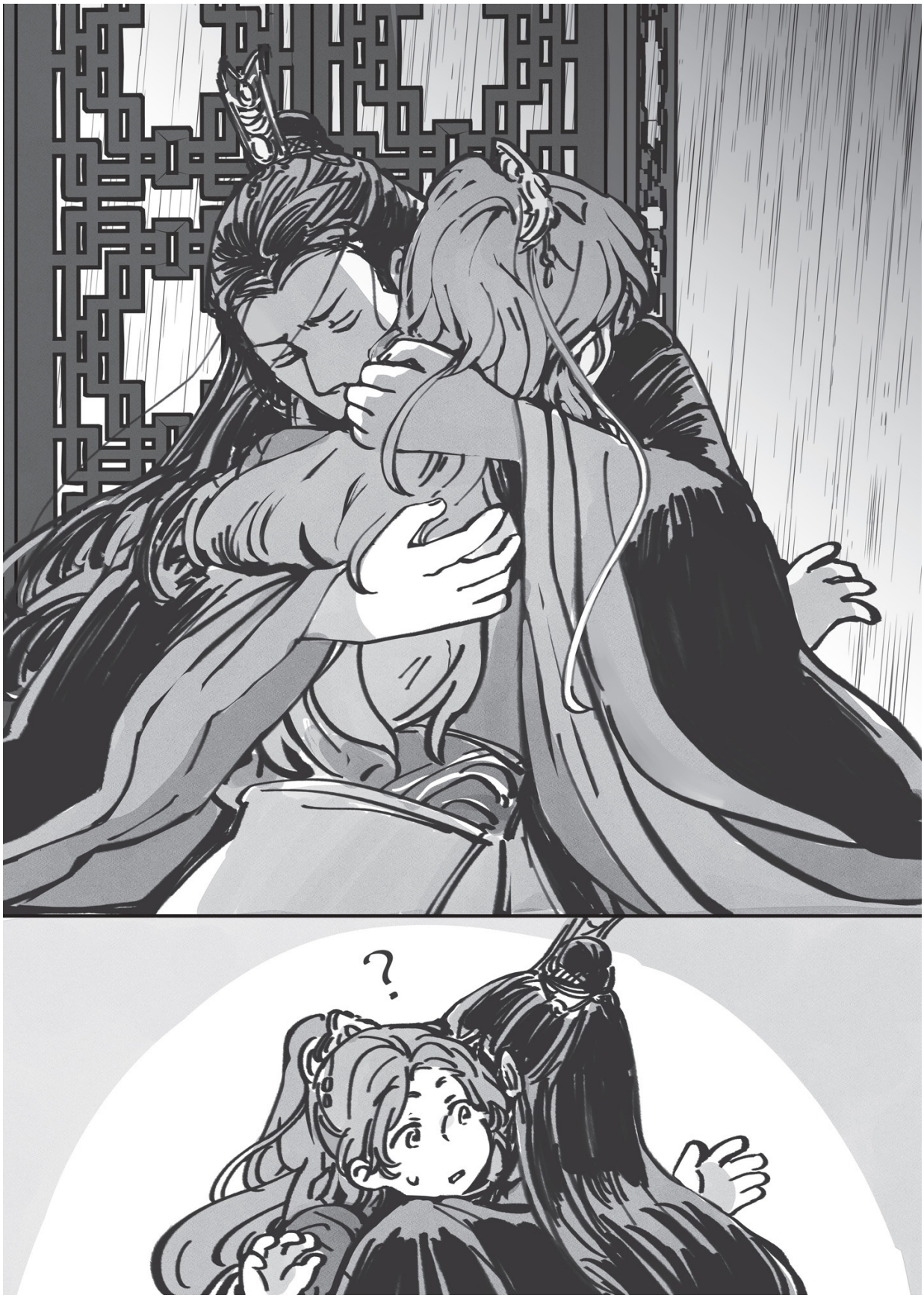
…Only to see Dabao sitting on the floor, rubbing his eyes. Li Yu stood by the window, his robes whipping about him. At that moment, he thought Li Yu was about to disappear into the air.

For all that he’d avoided Xiaoyu’s question, was the final tribulation here at last?

A tribulation by lightning was dangerous. And even if he was successful, he would have to say goodbye.

“Xiaoyu, don’t leave!” Mu Tianchi screamed. He rushed forward, putting himself between the fish and the rain, and held Li Yu firmly in his arms.

Dabao was crying because the wind had gotten into his eyes. Meanwhile, Li Yu, who had just wanted to close the window because it had gotten really windy, was more confused than he had ever been before. Dabao forgot about his eyes and stared at his two fathers, blinking.



“Tianchi, what’s going on?” Li Yu asked quietly, confused.

The crown prince was soaked through with rain. His brocade robes couldn’t be wetter. He clung to Li Yu, refusing to let go no matter what.

“Don’t go…” he said in a muffled voice.

Li Yu heard him repeat it multiple times before he suddenly came to a realization.

He’d said he was a carp spirit. The crown prince had really believed it, so he thought an ordinary thunderstorm was a tribulation!

What had he done? And why was this person so dumb…

Li Yu didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. He sniffled emotionally and tightly hugged the crown prince back.

“Tianchi, don’t worry,” Li Yu said. “I won’t go, nor will I leave you.”

Chapter 152:
Fishy Sharing the Country

LI YU CLOSED the window. The room was a bit damp from the rain that had been blown in. He called for Xiaoluo to take the kids to the next room.

Dabao kept holding his fish dad's hand, unwilling to let go. Li Yu hugged Dabao and kissed him, telling Dabao to go to the other room.

Now the only one left was the drenched crown prince.

Li Yu brought a clean cloth over and wiped off the water from his face. Mu Tianchi wouldn't look away, afraid that if he wasn't careful, Li Yu would just fly away.

Li Yu was both concerned and angry. "What are you looking at? This is just a thunderstorm, not a tribulation! You didn't even use an umbrella; do you think you're made of metal?"

The corners of the crown prince's mouth twitched upward, and he coughed lightly. "I forgot."

Li Yu nagged and scolded him for a bit, but his hands remained gentle. After wiping his face, Li Yu fetched a clean set of robes, intending to dry the crown prince off and then change his clothes. But the crown prince struggled.

"Xiaoyu, you got wet too."

He wanted to do it himself, but Li Yu glared at him. The crown prince, knowing he had no leg to stand on, had no choice but to shut up.

Li Yu efficiently helped him change, then looked at himself. It was true—most of his robes were wet. Li Yu took off the wet outer layer, found a blanket, and wrapped himself in it.

…Mu Tianchi wrapped himself in the blanket as well.

The two of them held each other, sharing body heat, and listened to the wind and rain outside.

Li Yu thought it over carefully, but he wasn't quite sure how to broach the topic. He decided to just go for it.

"Tianchi, did you want to give me the title of empress regent?"

The crown prince's secret had been revealed… He didn't know how Li Yu had found out, but that wasn't the problem. Carp spirits probably had their own special ways, but he didn't care about that either.

When it came to the issue of the country, he couldn't admit it no matter what.

"No," he said coldly, "I haven't thought about it."

This asshole wouldn't admit it! He was so close to completing the main quest line! Li Yu was so angry he wanted to bite him. But seeing the clear bite marks the crown prince still had on the back of his hand from when he gave birth, Li Yu couldn't do it.

"Stupid Crown Prince, listen to me." Li Yu grabbed the prince's collar. The prince looked down, silently and obediently wrapping Li Yu in his arms. "Do you think I'm going to ascend after I complete my tribulation? That's not what's going to happen!"

He couldn't explain the fish-scamming system, but Li Yu was trying to translate this transmigration novel into a cultivation novel for his

husband.

“I’m going through these tribulations so I can become human. That’s why I’m doing this.”

The crown prince couldn’t believe it. *That must be a lie,* he thought. *How could there be a yao in this world who didn’t want to be immortal but instead wanted to be human?*

But the person telling him this was the carp spirit who had given birth to his children…

The crown prince tightened his hold around Li Yu. “Really?”

“Yes!” Li Yu promised hurriedly. At least his desire to become human was absolutely real!

“Then why…” The crown prince was still worried.

“There is no ‘why.’ I don’t want to be immortal.” He gazed with shining eyes at the crown prince who feared him leaving, and he said gently, “I only like you.”

“You…will regret this,” the crown prince told him, voice hoarse.

Yao lived longer than humans. The crown prince felt conflicted over Li Yu wanting to be human. He hoped they could be fated to be together for many lives, but he didn’t want to ruin Xiaoyu’s future. That was how much he loved this fish. If it came down to himself or Xiaoyu, he would pick Xiaoyu every time.

“I won’t regret it, really!” Li Yu said loudly. “Tianchi, when you decided to make me the empress regent, did you regret it? What if I was scheming and calculating, what if I had ulterior motives for getting close to you, what if everything I did was to mess up this country—”

“You’re not,” the crown prince said confidently. “Even if you were, that’s all right.”

Li Yu froze. The crown prince said…it was all right?

The crown prince held Li Yu, letting him lay on his chest, his chin touching his forehead.

“Liao Kong said that you saved me before, but I couldn’t remember it,” he said. “But when the imperial physicians treated me for the xuewuzi poison, and I was unconscious for a few days, I remembered some things from the past.”

Many years ago, he had also held this fish like this. The fish had lain on his chest, happily swaying its tail.

“Xiaoyu, you saved me. I remember now. My life is yours. If it’s you, it’s all right.”

“You really remember?” Li Yu couldn’t believe it. He’d assumed it was just a side quest, but he really did appear in Mu Tianchi’s memories—what he thought was an illusion at the time was actually reality. Mu Tianchi had been given his name because of him. Li Yu was shocked, but more than that, he was overjoyed.

It was a good thing he’d saved Little Chubs, otherwise the result would have been disastrous.

Li Yu had always had a lot of questions. Since everything was on the table now, he could ask them.

“Tianchi, why do you always touch my head when I’m a fish? What does that mean?” he asked curiously.

He’d learned this move from the adult Mu Tianchi, then taught it to Little Chubs. Back then, Little Chubs hadn’t even known how to pet him. But now that he was an adult, he used it on him all the time. What exactly did this mysterious, addicting movement mean?!

Mu Tianchi smiled as he rubbed his head. “Behave,” he said. He refused to elaborate any further.

Li Yu hummed, crestfallen. “Then why did you save a random fish back then?” He could at least ask that, right?

Mu Tianchi could answer this question now. He kissed Li Yu’s lips and said, “Because the sound of the fish’s tail suddenly stopped.”

Huh??

“Although I didn’t remember exactly why at the time, I had memories of the sound of your tail. The sound stopped: that meant the fish was dying. I didn’t want you to die.”

Li Yu was an emotional mess. So that’s what it was—the crown prince saved him because he had saved the crown prince, which was also why he was able to save him. What came first: the chicken or the egg? This…was a fucking endless time loop!

But so what? The crown prince didn’t care at all. He…didn’t care about being stuck in a paradox.

“Tianchi, this is the last tribulation. Can you help me?” Li Yu said pitifully. “If I can’t complete it, I’ll turn into fish bones and fish ash.”

…The consequences were that serious?

How could he bear to let the carp spirit turn into fish bones and fish ash? He nodded solemnly. “What do you need me to do?”

A few days later, it was finally time for the official crown prince ceremony.

At Fengxian Gate, in front of all his ancestors, Mu Tianchi officially became the crown prince. After the edict was read, the emperor granted amnesty to the whole country so that everyone could celebrate.

Li Yu wore the official court robes befitting a crown prince consort, embroidered with fish. As the crown prince's official wife, he stood closest to the prince, expression serious, back straight.

After the edict was read, the emperor ordered the crown prince to offer sacrifices to the heavens on his behalf. Li Yu had to kneel down as well like all the others, but Mu Tianchi walked quickly over to him and grabbed his hand, ignoring everyone else.

That wasn't appropriate, was it?

Offering sacrifices to the heavens was the crown prince's time to shine! What was he, the consort, doing here? Li Yu felt everyone's gaze on him, and the pressure was suffocating.

"Don't be nervous. I already informed Royal Father," the crown prince said.

Li Yu glanced at the emperor from a distance. The emperor waved at them.

The crown prince and his consort were the future emperor and empress. There was nothing wrong with the consort participating in the ceremony alongside the crown prince. In any case, the crown prince had always been thorough, so Li Yu didn't need to worry about small details like that.

The crown prince led him to the platform made specifically for sacrifices.

The platform was very tall, and a statue of a god stood atop it. There were countless offerings in front of the statue. The drums sounded, and Li Yu focused on the crown prince’s movements, completing the complicated ritual along with him.

Afterward, the two of them gazed at the crowd beneath the platform. Li Yu suddenly thought of the people of the western border bowing to him. Facing a similar scene, he now felt confident and at ease.

Or perhaps this was just what it felt like to be on top.

“Was that all right?” the crown prince asked.

“Yes.” Li Yu nodded expectantly.

Xiaoyu wanted to complete his tribulation with a bang. It took the crown prince a while to figure out what that would mean, before he picked the date of the ceremony. He wanted to help Xiaoyu make it through his tribulation during that ceremony.

The crown prince gazed into Li Yu’s eyes, and said quietly, “I do.”

Li Yu could hear the system in his head, combining with the crown prince’s voice. It was both an oath of faithfulness and a sweet declaration of love.

“I do want to share the country with you,” the crown prince said clearly.

The “Sharing the Country” quest was complete. If Li Yu were dreaming, he would’ve woken himself up from laughing.

After the ceremony, he found some time to enter the system. Now that he was free, he stood up straight to collect his reward.

The system had already given him the final prize pack for completing the main quest. Li Yu tapped “Accept” excitedly, and his transformation skill went from “transforming into a human” to “transforming into a fish.” There was no time restriction, no limit to how many times he could transform, and he could cancel it at will. This meant by default, he was no longer a fish, he was a human again.

Not only that, he was a human who could turn into a fish at will.

It was the same for the merman and manmer skills too: they were completely unlimited now. He could perfectly play the part of a carp spirit.

On top of all that, his inventory was doubled again. Li Yu wasn’t even sure exactly how big it was anymore.

And for the final reward, an illusory door appeared before Li Yu.

‹What is this?› asked Li Yu.

‹Congratulations, user,› the system responded, *‹you have completed the main quest line and have changed the tyrant’s personality. You can go through that door to return to the modern world.›*

Oh…

Li Yu knew he had transmigrated into a book. So if he went through that door, he’d be leaving this book?

Li Yu took a deep breath. This really was tempting. He’d wanted this from the first day he arrived here—but now that he *could* leave, he just couldn’t take a step.

He had ties to this ancient world now. He had a husband who doted on him and adorable children. How could he leave them behind?

‹User, don’t worry. If you choose to leave, we will reformat the user’s memory so that you won’t feel guilty.›

What??? He knew this was possible, but it would only affect his memories, not his husband’s. What kind of a conscience would he have if he left behind his children and husband so that he could be free?

‹I won’t leave,› said Li Yu.

The crown prince had trusted and loved him without regrets, so he wouldn’t have any either.

If he’d been a carp spirit, he wouldn’t regret giving up on immortality.

As a system fish, he wouldn’t regret losing the chance to return to reality.

The system accepted Li Yu’s confirmation. The door flashed a few times, then disappeared.

‹Since the user didn’t accept this reward, it will be exchanged for something else.›

Two small buttons appeared where the door had been. A row of shiny, gold letters appeared above them: “Two-Day Trip to the Modern World.”

‹User, please select your group members. This reward allows you to temporarily visit the modern world. Two days in the modern world is only fifteen minutes in the ancient world. Would you like to accept?›

Oho, so this was basically just a fifteen-minute trip back to where he came from?!

It would be nice to go back to take a look for a little bit! Besides, it wouldn’t be a big deal to leave for just fifteen minutes. And he could go back with a group?!

But who should he take?

One option was his four sons and Xuebao. If he took one, he’d have to take all of them. He had to be fair.

But it would be a disaster if he took five kids to a strange place by himself.

‹*System, can I take the tyrant?*› Li Yu asked.

The system responded, ‹*Yes.*›

Li Yu excitedly went to go see the crown prince.

“Your Highness, how would you feel if I took you back to look around the carp spirit nest?”

Chapter 153:
Fish Going Back Home

MU TIANCHI had always said yes to this fish. When he found out they'd be going to the "mountain" the carp spirit lived on (he always assumed Li Yu was from a "mountain"), the crown prince was even more cooperative than usual.

But they couldn't take the kids. They were still young, and if they went along, it might be hard to look after them, so they were going to be left here in the manor.

The crown prince quickly finished his preparations, which were just to have someone stand guard over the room they were in and to ask Xiaoluo and Wang Xi to watch over the children.

Li Yu didn't know how to add the crown prince to his group, so he held the crown prince's arm tightly and entered the system.

‹I'm ready,› he said. *‹I want to take the crown prince with me. How do I do it?›*

‹User, please tap on the button that will take you to modern times,› the system replied.

Li Yu tapped it and suddenly lost consciousness, sinking into the darkness.

When he woke up again, he wasn't in the system or in the crown prince's arms. He had fallen asleep at a desk, and his phone had made an imprint on his face.

Li Yu looked up, confused, and glanced around the room he was in. He couldn't have been more familiar with his surroundings—it was his home in the modern times, and the phone that was pressed into his face…

That was his phone. Li Yu grabbed it to take a look, and what came into view was the webnovel he had been reading before he fell asleep—*The Tyrant and his Delicate Concubine*!

Huh? Why was it this one?

Li Yu threw his phone to the side, uninterested.

He felt like something was missing. What was it?

Holy shit!

Li Yu leapt up from the chair. His husband! He couldn't see his husband. His husband who came with him from the ancient world!

"Tianchi," he yelled, panicking, "Tianchi, are you there?!"

His house was empty. He was alone.

Oh right, the system!

Li Yu hurriedly entered the system—it was the same as always. The button he'd tapped on was "in progress," and there was a countdown that was a little under two days now.

Seeing the countdown, Li Yu's heart settled back down. It really was only going to be two days in the modern world. But he wanted to bring his husband back to his home. What was he going to do if his husband disappeared here?

‹System, I've lost contact with the crown prince. Can you tell me where he is?› Li Yu asked.

The fish-scamming system remained silent. Li Yu wanted to beat it up. How could a catastrophe like this happen just from visiting his home!

What if he couldn't find him within two days? Would the crown prince be in danger? When the time was up, would Mu Tianchi even be able to return to ancient times? Li Yu was worried.

‹User, please relax,› the system said. *‹You will find him.›*

…What was he waiting for? If the system said it was possible, then he'd just have to hurry up and go find him!

Li Yu exited the system. His home in the modern era was a one-bedroom apartment, with a living room and bathroom. All together, it was less than fifty square meters. When Li Yu had been very young, his parents had passed away, and this was the home his grandparents had left him. As things stood, if one person in the Li family ate well, then the entire family ate well. As such, when Li Yu transmigrated, he didn't have many ties in the modern world. He'd long since gotten used to living by himself.

Li Yu spun around to take in the entire room. It wasn't very big, so it was easy to see there was no one else there.

The crown prince knew nothing about the modern world, so Li Yu had to find him as soon as possible. But he had the feeling that since the crown prince had come here with him, he couldn't be far.

Li Yu rushed out with his phone and did a lap around the outside of the building, but he still didn't see anyone that looked like the prince.

He'd already planned on where to take his husband when they visited the modern world. At the same time, he'd comfort his husband and let him know that the carp spirit's nest was actually full of humans, and the carp spirit himself was one of them, to completely erase all the crown prince's

worries that he'd leave after some tribulation. But he'd never expected to lose the crown prince when he returned. Right now, finding the prince was his number one priority.

"Tianchi, Tianchi—" Li Yu yelled out into the street, but no one responded. Occasionally, a passerby or two glanced at him curiously.

Don't worry, calm down…

If the crown prince heard or saw him, he would respond, he was sure. But he thought of how he had been confused when he returned. Would the crown prince be confused too?

He'd wanted to give the crown prince a great surprise, but now it'd ended up as a great shock. The crown prince was a very careful man. Would he have hidden somewhere?

It was possible!

Near Li Yu's building, apart from the road, there was also a supermarket and a park. Li Yu thought the park seemed like a good place to hide, so he headed straight there. The park wasn't big, and Li Yu looked behind every tree but still didn't find any sign of the crown prince.

Could it be that rather than going somewhere quieter, the crown prince went somewhere with more people?

Li Yu tried the supermarket instead. But this supermarket was very large, with throngs of people inside. It was hard to find anyone. Li Yu didn't know what to do, but such a small thing wouldn't stump him. A new idea popped into his brain, and Li Yu went to the customer service area of the supermarket.

Not long after, the PA system in the supermarket came to life. "Mu Tianchi, your father Li Yu is looking for you. Please come to customer

service to meet up with your father Li Yu!”

Because the workers said they only made announcements about lost children, Li Yu had no choice but to make such a daring announcement. If the crown prince heard it, he would definitely come, and customer service was easy to find, since it had a large, visible sign. He thought it’d be difficult to find the crown prince in such a large supermarket, so he might as well make the prince come find him. He’d just apologize later!

Li Yu was confident in his plan, but he waited for a long time and still no one came. The workers who made the announcement for him looked at him sympathetically. “Young man, why hasn’t your son come yet? Do you want me to call the police for you?”

…Never mind, the crown prince was an illegal resident. There was no way he could call the police!

Li Yu thanked the workers and left his number, asking the workers to continue waiting for him. He decided to keep looking.

Although the announcement had been broadcast to the whole supermarket, what if the crown prince didn’t hear it?

Li Yu walked around to no success, and his phone didn’t ring either.

It’d been half a day since he returned, but he still hadn’t found the prince. What was he going to do? If the crown prince wasn’t in the supermarket either…

Li Yu stood among the crowd, not knowing where to go.

“Li Yu? Are you Li Yu?!” A voice floated over, catching Li Yu’s attention.

Li Yu looked over, only to see a tall, skinny, clean man in gold glasses, looking over at him in surprise.

Li Yu didn't recognize him. "Who are you?" he asked cautiously.

The man adjusted his glasses and chuckled. "I used to live in your building. I moved away after a while, but I still remember you. Don't you remember me?"

Li Yu really didn't have any recollection. The building he lived in was old and in disrepair. Many of his neighbors had moved away. But because the rent was cheap, new people always kept moving in, so he'd had a great deal of neighbors over the years. He couldn't remember them all.

But this man knew his address. Which meant he saw him often but never said anything.

Li Yu carefully observed this person. "Is there something you need?" he said lightly.

"Nothing, I just suddenly saw you, so I wanted to say hi. You're in university now, right? At which school?"

Li Yu had just finished gaokao. He'd received his acceptance letter, but before he could go report, he'd ended up transmigrating.

His grades weren't very good, so he'd gotten into a very mediocre school. After Li Yu told him which school, his neighbor said happily, "I live near there. Why don't I take you to see your future school, take you out for food, and we can catch up?"

The man patted his pocket and pulled out the keys to a luxury car.

Li Yu furrowed his brows and backed up a step. He wasn't comfortable with how overly friendly this person was, and the way he

casually showed off his wealth. He seemed to be hinting at something to him. After all the palace drama he'd experienced in another world, he was a lot more wary of strangers.

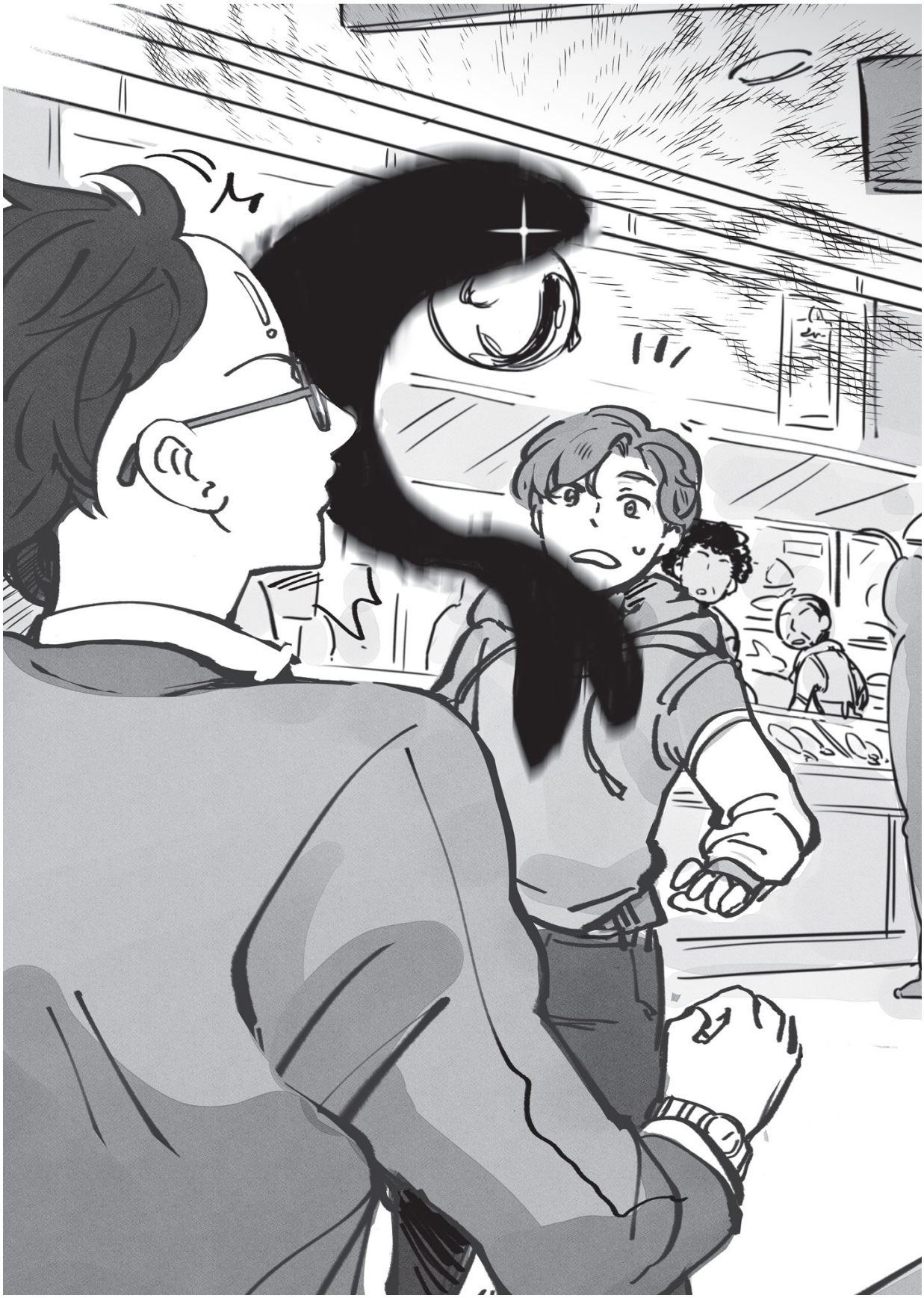
He shook his head. "Thanks, but no thanks."

"It's really not a problem. You don't have to be such a stranger. We're neighbors, after all."

And the man stepped forward to grab Li Yu. They were in the fresh foods section, where there were relatively few people. Li Yu was about to dodge him so he could reject him more seriously, when a large, thick shadow suddenly rushed out from behind him!

What the hell was that?

Li Yu was dumbfounded. The man in front of him was still trying to flirt with Li Yu, but Li Yu's attention was entirely on the black shadow behind him. The shadow seemed to be alive—like a long, thick piece of fabric. It twisted in the air and flew toward the man's forehead.



Whack!

What a sharp sound. The man was stunned by the sudden slap, and a wig fell from his head, revealing a shiny, bare scalp.

Pffft!!!

This scene seemed familiar somehow.

The man yelped, turned around, and the shadow once again struck accurately. This time, the man was slapped in the face. He looked like a braised egg.

The dark shadow slapped him a few more times without pause. The man kept on screaming, unable to see exactly what was hitting him. He just felt wet all over, and the pain was making him break out in goosebumps. He had a guilty conscience to begin with, and now that he was in this state, he didn't dare say anything more. He grabbed his wig from where it had fallen to the ground and ran away.

Li Yu was too lazy to bother with this playboy any further. He knelt down to look at the shadow.

The black shadow lay on the ground quietly, unmoving.

That was when Li Yu realized what it was: a large, mighty black fish the length of a person's arm and as thick as a person's wrist. Its scales were black and shiny, like hair.

…If it had been anything else, fine. But a fish…

Wait, fuck, was this… It couldn't be, right?

Li Yu quickly picked the large black fish up, glancing around.

Not too far ahead was a large fish tank, housing fish for sale. There was a puddle in front of the tank. Li Yu figured that must be where the fish

had jumped out from.

This fish was incredibly heavy. When Li Yu held it, it didn't struggle; it just lay in his arms, with none of its previous thunderous aura. Its dark eyes stared at Li Yu, its tail swishing lightly.

The more Li Yu looked, the more shocked he became. In a very quiet voice, he said, "Your Highness…husband? If it's you…can you rub my hand?"

He was afraid the fish wouldn't be able to hear him. But after he repeated it twice, the large black fish still didn't move.

Li Yu sighed, thinking he'd gone insane. How could the crown prince turn into a fish?

Sure, he'd transmigrated as a fish, but that didn't mean that when he transmigrated back, the crown prince would turn into a fish. That made no sense at all.

Li Yu did his best to convince himself. But suddenly, the fish in his arms leaped up and nimbly rubbed against Li Yu's face. After that, it even curled its tail around Li Yu's finger.

Li Yu completely froze. Holy shit, now he was in big trouble. This black fish really *was* the crown prince! The crown prince couldn't stand the creepy man flirting with his wife, so even though he'd turned into a fish, he had to jump out to protect his wife…

No, no, no, this should've been a simple two-day trip, but his husband had turned into a fish! What was he going to do?!

Chapter 154:
The Crown Prince Turns into a Fish

THE CROWN PRINCE had turned into a large, black fish. Li Yu held him tightly.

Though the employee in the fresh foods section didn't hear Li Yu whispering to the black fish, he had witnessed the fish suddenly leap out and slap another customer. The employee was shocked. When he recovered, he asked Li Yu mechanically, "Do you want this fish, sir?"

Li Yu nodded like a chicken pecking at rice. "Yes, yes, yes!" He was afraid the employee would suspect something, so he laughed to smooth things over. "I didn't expect this fish to be so agile. I can't believe it jumped out and slapped someone."

The employee thought about it, but that really did seem to be what had happened, so he wiped his sweat and said, "Then please weigh the fish, sir."

…Oh right, this was part of the fish-buying process.

Li Yu didn't need the employee's help. He went to weigh the fish crown prince by himself. The fish crown prince weighed eight pounds six ounces, even heavier than little Xuebao!

Li Yu was very quick, and sometimes urged the employees to be quicker. It didn't matter how expensive it was going to be; he could just close his eyes and pay with his phone. Once he'd weighed the fish, the employee finally seemed to have recovered from the shock, and casually

pulled out a knife. “This fish is a little heavy, it will be hard to carry. Should I clean it for you?”

Li Yu was horrified. “N-n-n-n-no need! I want to keep the fish!”

The employee was bewildered. Everyone came to the fresh foods section to buy food—this was the first time he’d seen someone who wanted to keep the fish. He wanted to ask this young man if he was kidding, when he felt a cold chill on his back.

When the employee pulled out the knife he thought he’d felt a little cold, but he hadn’t paid it any mind. Now, he was covered in goosebumps, as though he was being watched.

The employee sneezed. “This isn’t a pet fish,” he advised Li Yu. “It’s mainly for eating. Frying, baking, or stewing are all good options.”

Li Yu snuck a glance at the fish in his arms. Although it was darkly colored and difficult to interpret, the fish was tense, as though it were angry. Li Yu was afraid the crown prince would jump up and slap the grocery store employee too, so he rushed to say, “It’s okay if it’s not meant to be a pet fish, I like it!”

As soon as the words were out of this strange young man’s mouth, the employee no longer felt cold.

The crown prince nestled in Li Yu’s arms. Li Yu was afraid he had been outside of the water for too long. Though his house was nearby, it would be hard to carry him home, so he bought an extra-large basin, asked the employee for some water, and placed the crown prince carefully inside.

The employee didn’t understand. “You can just use a large bag.”

He really couldn’t. The crown prince had had a variety of beautiful fish tanks made for him. Now that it was his turn, he just got a plastic bag?

Although he was poor, he wanted the crown prince to be comfortable.

Li Yu carried the basin home. The moment he put the crown prince into the water, he felt a lot better.

The fish crown prince was thick and long. Even the largest basin in the supermarket wasn't big enough. The large, black fish had to curl up inside and didn't really have space to swim. When Li Yu got home, he immediately filled the bathtub with water and put the crown prince in there instead.

The crown prince started swimming slowly.

Li Yu brought over a chair and sat down next to the tub. He said, expression serious, "Don't worry, I'll definitely find a way to turn you back."

The crown prince fish wasn't worried at all. He swam a lap in the tub, then poked his head out of the water to nuzzle Li Yu's finger.

"Your Highness, are you hungry?" Li Yu asked tentatively. "Do you want some fish food?" Li Yu had purchased the fish food at the same time as the basin. Li Yu had made sure to ask whether or not it was made from 100 percent flour, and if it was completely natural and nontoxic.

He'd tried some himself first too. Modern fish food was much lower quality, inferior to the ancient version in both taste and texture. But it was better than nothing.

Li Yu put the fish food next to the crown prince's mouth, but to his surprise, the prince, who had been very cooperative ever since he turned into a fish, turned and slapped the food away.

Hm.

“That’s not good, that’s very wasteful,” Li Yu instructed him patiently.

But the crown prince simply refused to eat fish food. Because he was very large, his tail was very strong. Somehow, he managed to jump out of the tub and onto Li Yu. Li Yu rushed to grab him. Classic crown prince. He’d worked out how to move this freely already.

The weather was hot, so Li Yu was wearing a large, oversized T-shirt. The fish rubbed against his pale neck and started to burrow inside the shirt.

Li Yu was so ticklish, he burst into laughter, almost tearing up. He fished the thirsty crown prince back out, and the fish’s glistening eyes glared back at him fiercely.

Asshole, what do you think you’re doing?!

“Don’t move around randomly! I’ll come up with a plan right now!” Li Yu put the crown prince back in the tub.

He entered the system to demand answers. *‹What’s going on? Why did the crown prince turn into a fish?›*

It was the system’s fault he’d transmigrated as a fish, so it must also be the system who’d turned the crown prince into one.

‹The tyrant doesn’t exist in this world,› the system explained, *‹so he has to be a fish first.›*

The corners of Li Yu’s lips twitched. That was how the system answered him back then too. So it *was* the system’s fault.

‹Then how do I return the crown prince to his human form?› Li Yu asked.

The fish-scamming system immediately updated with a new side quest. *‹User, side quest “Tyrant Turning into Fish” is now available. Do you want to accept?›*

He had completed all the fish-scamming system’s main quests, but occasionally, a side quest would still pop up. As soon as Li Yu heard the name, he selected “Accept” without question.

The system continued: *‹Please help the tyrant return to his human form—the tyrant needs to kiss the user three times.›*

…Really?! Hello, system, are you actually run by the tyrant? Why did Li Yu get such difficult tasks to turn back to a human, but the prince got the script of *The Princess and The Frog*?

But his complaint lasted only a second. Li Yu was very afraid the system might change its mind and not turn the prince back into a human after all.

He accepted the quest and exited the system. Because he’d passed out on a chair, he noticed the black fish that was the crown prince was just watching over him from the water.

Li Yu’s heart grew warm. He wanted to turn the prince back as soon as possible.

He lifted the large, black fish out of the bath, holding on to its fins, and examined the fish carefully. This fish looked similar to the one the crown prince had painted in their family portrait, he realized.

The crown prince fish silently blew an inviting bubble at Li Yu.

Li Yu snorted. It was a little hard to start…but wasn’t it just a few kisses? He could do it!

Li Yu closed his eyes to kiss the fish. He wasn't sure where exactly he kissed, but his lips did get covered in scales.

His hands suddenly grew heavy. When Li Yu opened his eyes, a familiar face appeared before him.

The crown prince was back!

"Tianchi." Li Yu smiled as he pinched the crown prince's face.

Mu Tianchi held him tightly. This was their first hug in the modern world. Li Yu was still sitting on the chair, which was actually just an old-fashioned stool. The crown prince held him too tightly, and as they both leaned back, they fell into the tub together.

The tub was a little small for the two of them. He'd filled it with water for the fish crown prince to swim in, so it was a bit cold. Li Yu yelled at him to wait as he felt for the hot water tap. After he'd turned it on, he climbed onto Mu Tianchi, shivering.

The tub slowly filled with warm water, and some occasionally splashed out.

Li Yu's T-shirt became completely twisted and wrinkled. When it landed on the floor of the small bathroom, it spattered water across the room.

Li Yu thought he would drown in the raging waves. A pair of warm lips descended, kissing him on the eyelids.

They lay together on the tiny single bed, both listening to the hearts beating in each other's chests.

"Tianchi," Li Yu said after a while, "have you realized?"

Now that the crown prince had turned into a fish, Li Yu thought he ought to have figured some things out.

Mu Tianchi just rubbed his hair, smiling.

Originally, Li Yu had planned to reveal everything to the crown prince on their trip back home. But because the prince had disappeared, he hadn't had the chance. Now that he was found, Li Yu mustered up the courage to explain.

"I brought you back because I want to tell you this is where I came from. I was born here, then accidentally arrived in your world. That's when I turned into a fish. I think it's probably the same reason why you turned into a fish this time… I'm a human. I just happened to turn into a fish."

The crown prince paused. "So you're not a yao?"

"Exactly!" said Li Yu. "I'm a human just like you. Because my world and your world are so different, I wasn't sure I could make you believe it. I didn't even know how to explain why I had become a fish, so I had to just admit to being a yao. The 'tribulations' I mentioned before, that was because I had to do certain things to return to human form… So, I really just want to be human. I won't leave you, you don't have to worry," he added quietly.

He knew the crown prince was always worried he would leave. No matter how much he professed his love, it didn't matter. And all because he had said he was a carp spirit. After everything that had happened, he was confident in the crown prince's love for him, so it was time to reassure the prince.

Luckily, this was a great chance. Especially now that the crown prince had experienced being a fish, it should be a lot easier for him to

accept. After all, the crown prince was not a yao.

“I understand what you mean,” the crown prince said after some thought.

After Mu Tianchi suddenly arrived and realized he had turned into a black fish, he had been squeezed into a fish tank with two crabs and three turtles. After the shock had passed, many things had occurred to him.

Why was this “immortal carp mountain” so different from how he imagined? There were hordes of people passing by, looking at him, and they were all wearing strange clothes. And why had he turned into a fish?

Xiaoyu had come here with him. The crown prince wanted to find Xiaoyu, but after a few attempts to leap out, he’d always land back in the water.

He didn’t know where Li Yu was. All he could do was stay put and wait.

When the PA announced “Mu Tianchi” and “Dad Li Yu,” the crown prince knew Xiaoyu had to be nearby. But he couldn’t leave the fish tank. Then, when he finally saw Xiaoyu, a random man was flirting with him. The crown prince was furious, and he leapt up to teach the man a lesson. The scene seemed vaguely familiar; the crown prince remembered Xiaoyu had done a similar thing once.

It turned out he and Xiaoyu were quite similar in some ways.

When Li Yu came clean to him, Mu Tianchi finally understood that Xiaoyu had always been human to begin with. That was why he didn’t fear the Daoist priest or the black dog’s blood.

“…Tianchi, are you angry?” Li Yu asked weakly. He hadn’t anticipated that his helpless decision to pretend to be a carp spirit would

cause so many problems.

Mu Tianchi shook his head slowly. He didn't mind when Xiaoyu was a yao. How could he mind now that he was a human?

But this did open his eyes a little.

The crown prince smiled. "So what sorts of things did you need to do for your 'tribulations'?" He moved his finger to Li Yu's lips, tracing their shape sensually. "Were the many kisses you gave me just now one of those tasks?" He privately thought that this kind of tribulation was much better than being struck by lightning.

Li Yu had clearly already been intimate with the prince, but for some reason, talking about kissing still made him blush. His brain churned desperately as he tried to argue, "It wasn't *many* kisses, only three kisses!"

The crown prince kept smiling. "Mm, three kisses."

…Sob, was he being teased?!

The two of them snuggled together for a while.

The crown prince really liked this house that was filled with Xiaoyu. He practically wanted to stay here snuggling with Xiaoyu forever. But Li Yu couldn't waste this rare opportunity to visit home in bed, so after a while, he shoved at the crown prince.

"No, we have to go walk around outside."

The crown prince had no choice but to get up.

Li Yu had wanted to spend some time staring at his husband's face for a while, but he suddenly realized a very, very serious problem: the crown prince had turned from a fish into a human, so he didn't have clothes.

As expected of the fish-scamming system.

Holy shit! Husband, come back! This is a civilized society; you can't go streaking!

Li Yu decided to go buy his husband a set of clothes first. But the crown prince refused to let him go alone, in case anyone without a brain tried to harass him. He insisted on going with Li Yu.

Li Yu had no choice but to dig through his closet for a baggy T-shirt. It was a little big on him, so when he wore it, it looked effortless and casual. But the crown prince was a lot bigger than him. On him, it was very fitted.

They could make do with the shirt, but not with pants.

The crown prince grabbed a pair of basketball shorts, wanting to try them out, but Li Yu was too embarrassed. "Asshole, don't randomly wear my pants!"

Chapter 155:
Fish Couple Reflecting the Moon

LI YU FINISHED dressing the crown prince. The crown prince wore a tight T-shirt, and Li Yu's largest beach shorts. He'd purchased them online but bought a size too large and then forgot to return them, so they were brand-new. Finally, they could leave.

The crown prince was very confused over why he couldn't wear Li Yu's pants.

Even though he had clothes now, Li Yu still wanted to take the crown prince to buy more. Actually, after online shopping had become popular, he rarely went to physical stores anymore. Everyone said buying online was cheaper. But right now there was no time to wait for delivery. They had to buy some clothes right away.

Li Yu led the crown prince to a menswear store. The crown prince's handsome, delicate features attracted a lot of attention, and Li Yu was very proud. In modern times, his husband could be a celebrity. But unfortunately, they wouldn't be able to stay long.

Li Yu wanted to dress the crown prince nicely, and the store they went to sold styles that were cool and chic. Li Yu bought everything to dress him from head to toe, then picked a few modern, attractive suits.

Money in the modern world was merely a worldly possession, so he didn't hesitate to spend it on his husband. After all, he would be returning to the ancient world with the prince. Li Yu didn't feel any pain at all.

Everyone in the store was either buying or trying on clothes. Li Yu brought over the things he'd picked out and pushed the crown prince into the changing room.

After arriving in the modern world, Mu Tianchi had turned into a fish. First, he'd been stuck in the fish tank in the supermarket, then he'd been rescued by Li Yu and taken home. He hadn't had a chance to see much yet until Li Yu brought him out. Even though the crown prince had always been a calm man, he couldn't help but be shocked.

Xiaoyu was a human, not a yao, and this wasn't the carp spirit's immortal mountain—but it was even more dizzying and dazzling. The crown prince was a little overwhelmed.

Li Yu had told the crown prince to go try on clothes, but the crown prince wasn't entirely sure how to go about it. He was very curious about this tiny room that was only decorated with a curtain. He pushed and knocked for a while, but nothing happened.

Li Yu suddenly remembered—oh right! His husband didn't know how to wear modern clothing! He hurriedly squeezed himself into the changing room too to help the crown prince change.

Inside, not only could he help, he could also see the results immediately. If he wasn't satisfied, he could adjust the outfit until he was. Li Yu picked two outfits that looked the best on the crown prince and got the exact same thing for himself in his size. They'd already worn matching couple outfits countless times in the past. Now they could take on a modern couple outfit.

All the newlywed couple wanted to do was cuddle together. They'd cuddled plenty at home, but it was still hard to avoid kissing and hugging

each other wherever they went.

Changing was usually a quick affair for him. But Li Yu and the crown prince spent nearly half an hour in the changing room. When they came out, the two of them were wearing identical suits. Aside from Li Yu's lips being a little red and swollen and the slight redness rimming his eyes, there was nothing out of place.

Li Yu pulled out his phone to pay, then taught the crown prince how to pose and took a photo to set as his wallpaper. The photo came out very well—they were both smiling. He was beaming widely, and the crown prince wore a gentle smile.

The crown prince was good at painting, but when he saw the photo, he gained a deep respect for this little box called a "cell phone." Li Yu didn't have the option of claiming this was yao magic anymore, so, still smiling, he taught the crown prince to take a photo with the phone.

He'd learned the physics behind a camera in school, but he'd given all that back to the teacher. There wasn't enough time to explain everything in detail, so they might as well just enjoy themselves.

The crown prince, in his stylish suit, took pictures of nearly everything. But no matter what he was taking a picture of, Li Yu had to be in it. Li Yu let him have his fun. Who knew that the cold-blooded tyrant from the book liked photography?

Along the way, Li Yu bought some takoyaki from a shop, and they ate it together as they walked.

The crown prince resisted these weird, round things at first, and asked in a low voice, "This is seafood?"

Li Yu immediately understood his concern. “It’s octopus,” he chuckled. “It’s not a fish like us!”

The Crown Prince liked it when he said “us,” and he also liked that the takoyaki wasn’t made of fish. Keeping an open mind, he tried a bit of it and found that it was indeed very fragrant.

The carp and the large, black fish quickly devoured the takoyaki.

Then Li Yu took the crown prince to a history museum.

This was somewhere he’d always wanted to take the crown prince. In order to understand the culture of a place, aside from researching online, one could also go to a history museum.

Li Yu didn’t know what kind of revelations coming to the modern world would give the crown prince; all he could do was show his world to him as much as possible.

Inside the museum, there were relics from each of the dynasties of this world, from various countries. There was the sword of the emperor and even the jars and pots that the common folk used to make pickles. Each piece was accompanied by a voice recording to explain its name, use, and significance.

One era always had to fall for a new one to rise. The crown prince listened attentively with his brows furrowed, deep in thought.

After they were done at the museum, Li Yu took his husband to the amusement park.

This was Li Yu’s selfish little desire. If he could never come back here again, he had to get his money’s worth now.

“I’ve never been here before,” he told the crown prince. “Every time I saw kids my age go I’d always be envious.”

The tickets were a little expensive, and Li Yu’s family had been tight on money when he was young, so they couldn’t afford them. Later, when he grew up, he was finally able to afford them, but he didn’t have anyone to go with.

The crown prince said firmly, “I’ll go with you.”

Li Yu wanted to go on the roller coaster, and the two of them lined up for a long time. But the ride that flipped the world upside down only lasted a few minutes. Li Yu held the crown prince tightly, his face pale. The crown prince fared a little better, but he felt that they were paying money to suffer.

“This isn’t suffering,” Li Yu insisted. “It’s a way to release your emotions.”

Because on the roller coaster, everyone was screaming. Nobody would notice that a certain person among them was a little sad.

Having experienced a rollercoaster, Li Yu glanced at the crowd behind him and felt a flash of melancholy at having to say goodbye. The crown prince saw it and held his hand once again.

“I’m here,” he said quietly. “I’ll stay with you.”

“The next ride is bumper cars. I really, really wanted to do this as a kid too.” Li Yu fluttered his eyelashes.

That was two whole “really”s, so of course the crown prince had to accompany him until the end.

Bumper cars were a ride for children, so the cars weren't very large. For Li Yu to sit in one with the crown prince, they both had to scrunch up in the seats, knee to knee. Li Yu wasn't very familiar with the ride, and he fidgeted for a while—perhaps he pressed something he wasn't supposed to, because they started spinning on the spot.

"I'll fix it, I promise!" Li Yu panicked. He wanted to show his husband how cool he was, but he was making a fool of himself instead!

"It's all right." The crown prince seemed to have thought of something: the corners of his lips tilted up in a slight smile.

Perhaps because they couldn't control a bumper car as two fully grown men, they ended up being judged by their peers, and car after car came and rammed into them. Li Yu and the crown prince started spinning in a new direction.

The crown prince was furious. How dare they bump into Xiaoyu's car!

Li Yu hurried to hold him down. "Tianchi, that's how you play this game! Don't get mad!" Li Yu had finally figured out how to control the car. "Watch this!" he said.

Li Yu drove the car after the one that had bumped into them and ran into them harshly. "Ha ha ha ha, time for revenge!"

The crown prince really didn't understand why they had to bang into each other like this, but seeing how much fun Xiaoyu was having and that he didn't seem sad anymore, the crown prince shook off any negative feelings he had.

But he couldn't just sit in the car and let his wife do all the work. The crown prince pushed a red button for Xiaoyu. The car immediately rammed

into a wall.

“Tianchi,” Li Yu yelled, “don’t touch anything!”

Li Yu led his husband around the park, conquering all the rides and attractions. The two of them took a lot of photos, even one on the bumper cars.

In the blink of an eye, a whole day had passed. When they returned to Li Yu’s house, the two of them were wearing the same T-shirt. Li Yu, as the host, decided to make dinner. He found some fresh cucumber in the fridge.

The crown prince knew what this meant.

Li Yu smashed the cucumbers as usual, but in the time it took him to boil some noodles and come back out of the kitchen, the crown prince had already eaten all the cucumbers. He didn’t even leave behind any sauce.

How could my husband be this hungry? Li Yu thought. *Poor thing.*

And he didn’t think much else of it.

He brought over two bowls of plain noodles, one each for him and the prince. After they ate, both of them were slightly overheated. Li Yu turned on a small fan so that it would blow cool air over them when they lay down.

The crown prince looked curiously at this object that could create wind. Xiaoyu said this was called an “appliance.”

The little appliance dispersed the heat a bit. Li Yu and the crown prince looked into each other’s eyes and leaned into each other at the same time, their lips slowly touching.

Originally, Li Yu had wanted to encourage the crown prince to do a little something on the small bed, but they’d only kissed for a second when,

with a “pop,” the crown prince returned to being a large, black fish.

Brought to a sudden stop like this, Li Yu felt like he was about to explode!

Fish-scamming system, come here! I promise not to beat you up! Why has the crown prince turned into a fish again?!

But the system didn’t need to explain; Li Yu already knew the answer. The crown prince’s time limit was up, the same way his own transformation used to function.

He had kissed the crown prince three times to transform him into a human, so Li Yu picked up the large, black fish and kissed him a few more times. Nothing happened.

The system chimed in. *‹User, please try again tomorrow.›*

…Okay, so the once-a-day thing was just like him too.

Li Yu had no other ideas. He put the fish crown prince back into the bathtub. The black fish rubbed up against him, telling him to go rest and not to worry.

But “tomorrow” was still a long way away.

Li Yu didn’t want to be apart from the crown prince for even a second. He remembered that after he completed the main quest line, he could turn into a fish whenever he wanted now. Did that skill still work in modern times?

Li Yu tried to activate the skill. Unaffected by time or space, his skill worked at once, and he turned into a silver koi speckled with gold. Li Yu jumped into the bathtub and swam a few laps around the crown prince. The crown prince stared at him, shocked.

“Tianchi, I came to keep you company,” said Li Yu, smiling.

The crown prince was larger than Li Yu. He dove down and swam right underneath Li Yu.

Husband, what are you doing!

The crown prince started to float upwards, carrying Li Yu on his back.

Moonlight filtered in through the window, and the two fish in the tub were exactly like the night sky: silver as the spotless moonlight, and black as the deep night.

Chapter 156:
Crystal Fish Palace

THE NEXT DAY, Li Yu helped Mu Tianchi recover his human form and took him to the places he still wanted to go.

Yesterday, they'd spent the whole day outside. At first the crown prince was amazed, then he gradually began to ponder what he had seen. Li Yu supported him in this; maybe if he got some new ideas they could bring about change in the ancient world. They didn't have much time left. Since the crown prince had such plans, Li Yu thought they might as well bring some "local specialties" back. He could still transform, after all, so he probably still had his inventory too.

Li Yu checked what he had in his inventory. He had put all these things in when he was still in the ancient world and could take them out now. By that logic, he should also be able to take out the things he put in from the modern world when he returned to the ancient world.

Things were much more convenient with his golden finger.

At first, Li Yu wanted to buy all kinds of books and put them inside, but physical books were heavy. It would be hard to collect everything he needed in such a short time. Cleverly, Li Yu bought two e-readers and subscribed to multiple ebook providers. Knowledge was the ladder to improvement. Li Yu wanted to set up this ladder for the crown prince.

Now that he had the e-reader, he'd have to find a way to keep it charged. There was no electricity in ancient times, so Li Yu bought a solar-powered charger and a portable battery. That way, he could bring his phone

too. There was no signal in the palace, of course, but he could at least use it as a camera, and that way he could keep the photos they'd taken as well.

Since he was bringing back "local specialties," it would be good if he could bring some common medicines. Li Yu bought some at a pharmacy, and while he was paying, he came across a bunch of boxes that said things like "ultra thin and dynamic, free your passions." Li Yu had never paid attention to that kind of thing before, but weren't these condoms? They were even on sale: buy ten get one free, 20RMB off 100RMB. What good timing! Li Yu bought several cases at once.

The other customers looked at him with ridicule in their eyes. Li Yu might have been embarrassed, but he didn't back away at all. This would affect his and his husband's happiness for the rest of their lives, so of course he had to buy buy buy!

Because Li Yu had suffered a lot giving birth to Xuebao, the crown prince felt bad and decided to never let him give birth in human form again. Fish form was up for consideration, but it would be hard to get away with it in the palace. Ever since Li Yu recovered, he and the prince had tried many different methods, but contraception in ancient times was all a little…off. They didn't want to drink any medicine, so in the end, they just had to control themselves. Li Yu was fine, but it was very difficult for the crown prince.

Stuffed with multiple boxes, the inventory was nearly full. The crown prince insisted on taking the clothes Li Yu had bought him. There was no way he could wear those back in ancient times, but the crown prince didn't want to leave behind anything that Xiaoyu had given him. It would be good enough to just hang it up somewhere.

Li Yu still wanted to take the crown prince to see magnificent buildings and ride the high-speed rail, but the crown prince said he just wanted to see the places Li Yu frequented. There were many amazing things in this world, but what the crown prince cared about most was Li Yu.

Li Yu was moved. He decided to take the crown prince to his elementary school, his middle school, and his high school instead. He showed him the classrooms he once studied in, the desks he once sat at, and the soccer field he once ran on. The crown prince couldn't understand most of it, but listening to Li Yu tell stories about his childhood, the young, cute Xiaoyu seemed to appear before his eyes.

The last stop was a gravesite.

Li Yu's parents had died when he was young, and his grandparents, who raised him, had long since passed as well. Li Yu put down a bouquet of flowers before the grave and told them he was now married to a crown prince from ancient times.

He wouldn't show any sadness anymore, because he knew his family and the crown prince all wanted him to live on happily.

When he learned this was Xiaoyu's family, Mu Tianchi imitated Li Yu and bowed toward the grave…

The time limit of two days was up. In the end, the two of them woke up in their room in the crown prince manor. The incense they had lit before they left was still smoking.

Li Yu rubbed his eyes forcefully. His trip back to modern times with the prince couldn't just be a dream, right?

The crown prince looked at him with a smile on his face. Pulling up his sleeve, he showed Li Yu his hand. There was now a scale-like mark on

the back of it.

“Is this…” Li Yu was stunned. After a trip to the modern world, could the crown prince now also transform—

Was the crown prince now also a fish with a system??

How could the tyrant lead male become a fish with a system? Before Li Yu could figure it out, the system said clearly: *‹Congratulations to the user for completing the side quest ‘Tyrant Turning into a Fish.’ The tyrant now has the ability to transform. This ability can only be used once a day, and he can only maintain his fish form for two hours at a time. There are no level ups available for this ability.›*

Aha. The crown prince didn’t need to do any quests; he wasn’t a beleaguered system fish like him. This ability was basically just for fun.

But would the crown prince turn into a fish for fun during his free time? Probably not, right…

As it turned out, he was completely wrong. The crown prince loved being a fish, especially being a fish with Li Yu. Li Yu himself was delighted.

After he’d become the crown prince consort, he had more and more things to get done. Turning into a fish let him find some peace and quiet, far away from the hustle and bustle of life. If the crown prince turned into a large, black fish, Li Yu would transform too. It was like they were respecting their oath from the modern era: he liked being with the crown prince.

The first time the children saw the large, black fish version of the crown prince, they didn’t know it was their dad, and they were all

frightened to tears. After they found out, though, they all wanted to turn back into fish and swim around with their dads.

Now, Xuebao was the only one who'd never been a fish in their family. Li Yu thought about the family portrait the crown prince had painted. Even the crown prince could turn into a fish now, and the four sons would be able to choose to turn into fish once they turned seven, so perhaps Xuebao would also be able to one day as well. There was no need to feel sorry for her.

Li Yu had brought the children gifts from the modern era: a set of tiny, colorful picture books. They were fun, pretty, and not too conspicuous. He wanted to tell the children the bedtime stories he'd been told as a child.

Meanwhile, Li Yu handed the carefully prepared e-reader over to the crown prince and taught him how to use it. Because the words on the e-reader were slightly different from ancient writing, Li Yu—who was still being taught how to read and write despite already having five kids—could finally turn the tables and teach the crown prince instead!

He sat in the crown prince's lap, teaching him an entire page of simplified Chinese, when he realized that this was the position they used when the crown prince taught him. Now he was teaching the crown prince, yet they were still in the same position. Something didn't seem quite right.

…With the way this was going, Yu-laoshi was going to get eaten at the end of this lesson!

But frankly, there was nothing scary about being eaten. They could take the chance to try out what "ultra thin and dynamic" felt like.

And so, life at the crown prince manor saw some welcome new changes.

The crown prince settled down to read the books in the e-reader. He picked the ones he was interested in, and slowly read through them all. If there was something he didn’t understand, he’d ask Li Yu, and Li Yu would do his best to explain using the language in the book.

He didn’t know how this world would change, but if the crown prince needed him, he’d do his best to support him.

The crown prince said he would present him with a different, flourishing era. Li Yu couldn’t wait.

Epilogue

A MONTH LATER, the emperor personally held a grand wedding for the crown prince and Li Yu.

The emperor was very happy with the crown prince. He was starting to come up with more and more of his own new ideas. A year later, the emperor abdicated the throne to the crown prince and became the grand emperor, focusing on enjoying his time with his grandchildren.

On the day the new emperor ascended to the throne, the entire country was granted amnesty, and despite opposition, he appointed Crown Prince Consort Li Yu as empress regent.

Usually, when a prince became the emperor, he would start to fill up his harem. But Mu Tianchi didn't. From Prince Jing to crown prince to emperor, he only had one person by his side, and his title was different from everyone else's: empress regent. This was beyond most people's wildest dreams. The emperor showered the empress with love, and this Empress Li Yu also demonstrated extraordinary talent and prowess. Together, the couple began to enact change everywhere. These changes brought about eight hundred years of peace and prosperity, but of course, that was all long after the fact.

After ascending to the throne, apart from appointing his empress, he had another important task in mind: renovating the palace.

Those who were familiar with the crown prince manor, like Wang-gonggong and Ye-shizi, were all expecting this.

The emperor, who once turned his entire manor into a giant pond, insisted on renovating the palace so that it could be an even more majestic pond. Apparently, beneath the water, there was a beautiful miniature palace, aptly named the Crystal Palace. Inside the Crystal Palace lived the pet fish that the emperor had had back when he was just a prince. It was a silver koi with flecks of gold; people saw it often.

This koi fish was always playing with a large, black fish. Sometimes, they would be surrounded with a few smaller fish. At first there were four of them; then it became five.

Everyone said these pets took after their masters; the emperor’s seven pet fish looked extremely like the emperor, the empress, and their five royal children.

The Disabled Tyrant's Beloved Pet Fish
FIN

APPENDIX

Characters, Names, and Pronunciations

Characters

MAIN CHARACTERS

LI YU 李鱼: A modern-day webnovel reader who has been transmigrated into a fish.

MU TIANCHI 穆天池: The mute fifth prince, also known as Prince Jing.

THE ROYAL FAMILY

THE EMPEROR: Prince Jing's father.

EMPRESS XIAOHUI: Prince Jing's mother; deceased.

LADY QIU 仇氏: Mother of the second prince, Mu Tianzhao. Previously a noble consort, now banished to the cold palace.

PIAOXUE 飘雪 ("FLOATING SNOW"): Lady Qiu's pet cat.

CONSORT QIAN 钱妃: Mother of the third prince, Mu Tianming.

CONSORT ZHANG 张妃: Mother of the sixth prince, Mu Tianxiao.

CHU YANYU 楚燕羽: Prince Jing's love interest in the original webnovel, now one of the emperor's concubines.

SECOND PRINCE MU TIANZHAO 穆天昭: The oldest prince, since demoted to Marquis of An.

THIRD PRINCE MU TIANMING 慕天明: The second prince's rival for the role of crown prince, since demoted to the Marquis of Ping.

SIXTH PRINCE MU TIANXIAO 穆天晓: Pretended to support the third prince while secretly plotting to take over.

LIANG SUYUN 梁素云: The sixth prince's wife.

SEVENTH PRINCE: Unnamed, yet to come of age.

EIGHTH PRINCE: Unnamed, yet to come of age.

LUO RUISHENG: Head eunuch and the emperor's personal servant.

PRINCE JING'S MANOR

WANG XI 王喜: A eunuch; Prince Jing's personal servant.

DABAO 大宝: Prince Jing's first son. In fish form he is all gold.

ERBAO 二宝: Princer Jing's second son. In fish form he is gold with flecks of silver.

SANBAO 三宝: Prince Jing's third son. In fish form he is all silver.

SIBAO 四宝: Prince Jing's fourth son. In fish form he is grayish black.

XUEBAO 雪宝: Prince Jing's daughter. Her nickname, Xiaomian'ao (小棉袄), is a common term of affection for girls, meaning "warm cotton jacket."

MADAM QIN: The children's wet nurse.

CHENG'EN MANOR

YE QIAN 叶骞: The previous duke of Cheng'en and the current Duke's father. Prince Jing's grandfather.

THE DUKE OF CHENG'EN 承恩公: Ye Qinghuan's father.

YE QINGHUAN 叶清欢: Prince Jing's cousin, heir to the House of Cheng'en.

THE PRINCESS OF JINJUE 金绝公主: Married to Ye Qinghuan.

QINGHE-JUNZU 清河郡主: Ye Qinghuan and the Princess of Jinjue's daughter.

XIONGFENG 叶清欢 ("FIERCE WIND"): Ye Qinghuan's dog.

OTHER

LIAO KONG 了空: A zen master from Huguo Temple, highly trusted by the emperor.

ZHENG JING 郑经: Secretary of the Ministry of Works.

Name Guide

Diminutives, Nicknames, and Name Tags:

A-: Friendly diminutive. Always a prefix. Usually for monosyllabic names, or one syllable out of a two-syllable name.

DOUBLING: Doubling a syllable of a person's name can be a nickname, e.g., "Mangmang"; it has childish or cutesy connotations.

XIAO-: A diminutive meaning "little." Always a prefix.

-ER: An affectionate diminutive added to names, literally "son" or "child." Always a suffix.

Family:

DI/DIDI: Younger brother or a younger male friend.

GE/GEGE/DAGE: Older brother or an older male friend.

JIE/JIEJIE/ZIZI: Older sister or an older female friend.

Other:

GONGZI: Young man from an affluent household.

-**GONGGONG:** A respectful suffix for eunuchs.

-**SHIZI:** Denoting the heir to a title.

Pronunciation Guide

Mandarin Chinese is the official state language of mainland China, and pinyin is the official system of romanization in which it is written. As Mandarin is a tonal language, pinyin uses diacritical marks (e.g., ā, á, ǎ, à) to indicate these tonal inflections. Most words use one of four tones, though some are a neutral tone. Furthermore, regional variance can change the way native Chinese speakers pronounce the same word. For those reasons and more, please consider the guide below a simplified introduction to pronunciation of select character names and sounds from the world of The Disabled Tyrant's Beloved Pet Fish.

More resources are available at sevenseasdanmei.com

GENERAL CONSONANTS

Some Mandarin Chinese consonants sound very similar, such as z/c/s and zh/ch/sh. Audio samples will provide the best opportunity to learn the difference between them.

X: somewhere between the **sh** in **sh**eep and **s** in **s**ilk

Q: a very aspirated **ch** as in **ch**arm

C: **ts** as in pan**ts**

Z: **z** as in **z**oom

S: **s** as in **s**ilk

CH: **ch** as in **ch**arm

ZH: **dg** as in do**dg**e

SH: **sh** as in **sh**ave

G: hard **g** as in **g**raphic

GENERAL VOWELS

The pronunciation of a vowel may depend on its preceding consonant. For example, the “i” in “shi” is distinct from the “i” in “di.” Vowel pronunciation may also change depending on where the vowel appears in a word, for example the “i” in “shi” versus the “i” in “ting.” Finally, compound vowels are often—though not always—pronounced as conjoined but separate vowels. You’ll find a few of the trickier compounds below.

IU: as in **ewe**

IE: **ye** as in **ye**s

UO: **war** as in **war**m

CHARACTER NAMES

LǏ Yú: Li (as in *ly* from merri*ly*), yu (as in you)

Mù Tiānchí: Mu (as in moo), t (as in tea), ian (as in Ian), chi (as in *ch* from *ch*ange)

* *Note:* With chi, the i is not pronounced like ee, the way Li is pronounced. With chi, it is a sort of emphasized ch noise without any vowel sound. This applies to z, c, s, zh, ch, sh, and s.

Yè Qīnghuán: Ye (as in *ye*sterday), qing (as in *ching* from tea*ching*), h (as in *h* from *h*ello), uan (as in one)

* *Note:* The difference between ch and q is that chi is a sound produced more with the front of the teeth with a puckered mouth, while q is a sound produced more at the back, with a wider mouth.

Xióngfēng: Xi (as in *sh* from *sh*eep), ong (like *own* but with the *ng* from ring), feng (as in *fung* from *fung*us)Prince Jing’s third son. In fish form he is all silver.

APPENDIX

Glossary

Glossary

CONCUBINES 妻妾: In ancient China, it was common practice for a wealthy man to possess women as concubines (妾) in addition to his wife (妻). They were expected to live with him and bear him children. Generally speaking, a greater number of concubines correlated to higher social status, hence a wealthy merchant might have two or three concubines, while an emperor might have tens or even a hundred.

DI AND SHU HIERARCHY 嫡庶: Upper-class men in ancient China often took multiple wives, though only one would be the official or “di” wife, and her sons would take precedence over the sons of the “shu” wives. “Di” sons were prioritized in matters of inheritance.

ANCIENT CHINESE IMPERIAL HAREM 后宫: Emperors would take multiple wives, and as a whole, they were referred to as the “back palace.” This term can also be used to refer to the physical location where the concubines lived, which was the inner half of the palace. The concubines were separated into ranks, and their ranking directly correlated to how well they were treated, how much respect they were afforded, and how much money they were given. The ranks of the concubines changed throughout the dynasties, but these remain fairly consistent and are often used in modern media:

- Empress 皇后
- Imperial Noble Consort 皇贵妃

- Noble Consort 贵妃
- Consort 妃
- Concubine 嫔
- Noble Lady 贵人

ANCIENT CHINESE ARISTOCRACY: It was unusual for a prince to be demoted to a lower rank, but a title like “Marquis” was still a very impressive one. In order, the five highest titles after those of the emperor and princes were as follows:

- Duke 公
- Marquis 侯
- Count 伯
- Viscount 子
- Baron 男

GRAND SECRETARIAT 内阁: The Grand Secretariat was a part of the government responsible for coordinating the rest of the government. Because they controlled communications to and from the emperor, they eventually became more powerful than the Six Ministries. The Grand Secretariat was headed by six Grand Secretaries (大学士).

SIX MINISTRIES 六部: The central government system in ancient China. It consisted of the Ministries of Personnel, Revenue, Rites, War, Justice,

and Works. Each of the Ministries was headed by a Minister (尚书) and two Deputy Ministers (侍郎).

IMPERIAL ASTROLOGICAL BUREAU 钦天监: An official branch of the government responsible for things like creating calendars and observing the skies. It was believed that the stars held messages from the heavens, and so the Imperial Astrological Bureau was trusted by the emperor to predict incoming disasters or auspicious events.

TAELS 两: A unit of measurement for weighing gold and silver, used as a standard form of currency.

GOLDEN FINGER 金手指: A protagonist-exclusive overpowered ability or weapon. This can also refer to them being generally OP (“overpowered”) and not a specific ability or physical item.

Footnotes

Chapter 115: Fish Baby Therapy

[1] The Imperial Clan Court (宗人府) was in charge of all things having to do with the imperial family during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Chapter 117: Brave Fish Babies

[2] A paraphrased quote from chapter 16 of Analects of Confucius, Ji Shi (季氏).

Chapter 124: Fishy Teacher

[3] The first line of Three Character Classic (三字经), a piece of classic Chinese literature often used to teach children.

Chapter 126: Lusty, Horny Fishy

[4] “Warm cotton jacket” (xiaomian’ao, 小棉袄) is a common endearment for little girls.

Chapter 140: Crafty Fishy

[5] “Dog blood”（狗血）is a slang term for fiction with a lot of clichéd, over-the-top elements, for example amnesia, long lost family members, faked deaths, etc.

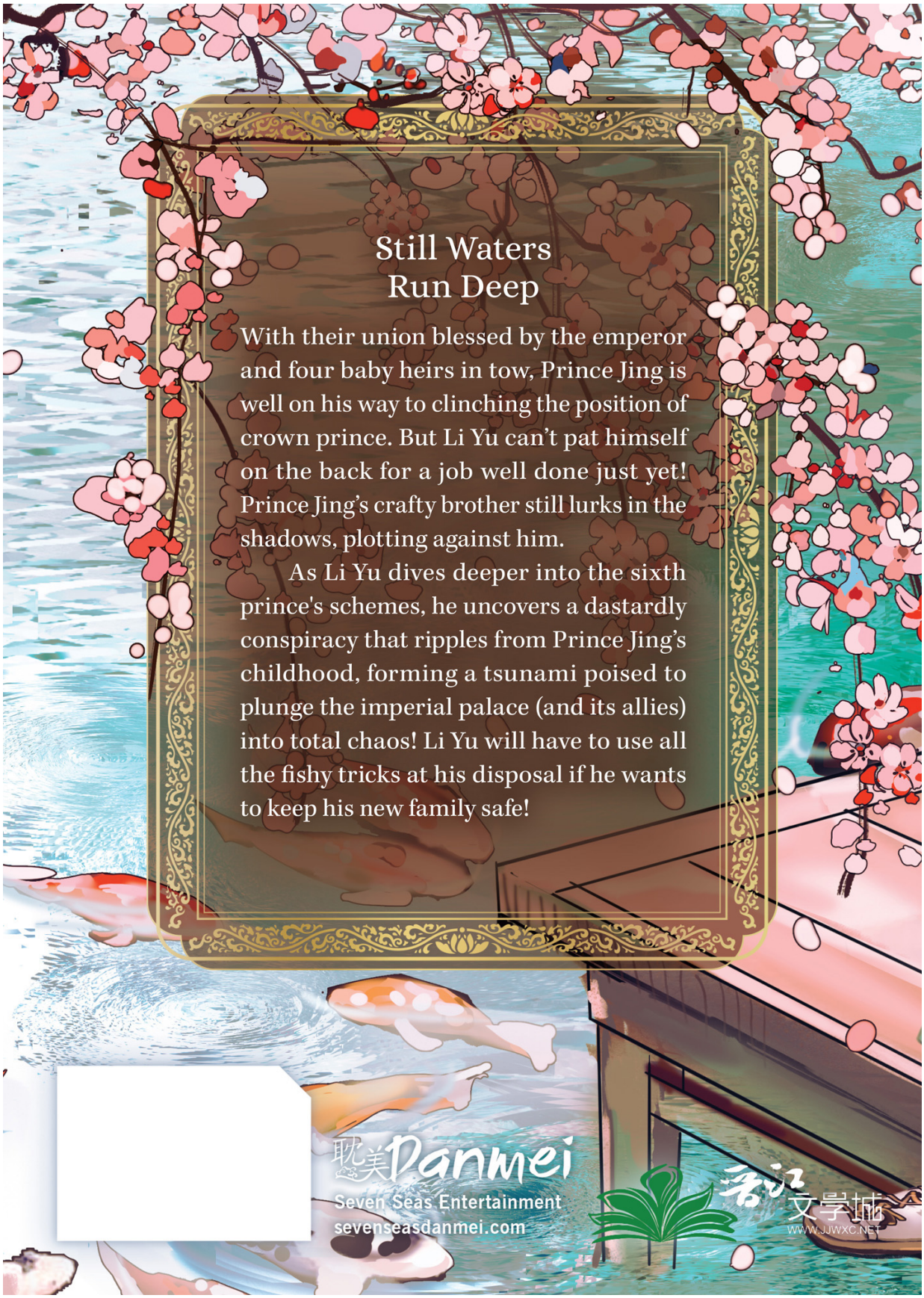
Chapter 146: Fishy Birth of a Daughter

[6] In China, pregnancy is culturally considered to last ten months, in the same way the normal length is thought of as nine months in the west.

Chapter 147: One-Month-Old Fish Mei

[7] 琼雪, meaning fine jade and snow.

[8] 温慧, meaning gentle and intelligent or wise.


Still Waters
Run Deep
With their union blessed by the emperor and four baby heirs in tow, Prince Jing is well on his way to clinching the position of crown prince. But Li Yu can't pat himself on the back for a job well done just yet! Prince Jing's crafty brother still lurks in the shadows, plotting against him.
As Li Yu dives deeper into the sixth prince's schemes, he uncovers a dastardly conspiracy that ripples from Prince Jing's childhood, forming a tsunami poised to plunge the imperial palace (and its allies) into total chaos! Li Yu will have to use all the fishy tricks at his disposal if he wants to keep his new family safe!
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